

THE INVESTIGATORS in

THE MYSTERY OF THE GHOST SHIP





in

**THE MYSTERY
OF THE
GHOST SHIP**

In a foggy night, a ghost ship appears off Malibu beach. A witness engages Jupiter, Pete and Bob to investigate. The Three Investigators cannot believe their eyes when they finally see a three-master with tattered sails gliding through the sea. At the very next moment, it disappears into thin air. Their investigation leads them to pirate legends from times long past. Has a curse brought the ship back to the present? To solve the mystery, the three detectives have to board the ship themselves...

The Three Investigators
in
The Mystery of the Ghost Ship

*Original German text by
André Marx*

*Based on characters created by
Robert Arthur*

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(The Three ??? and the Ghost Ship)

by

André Marx

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Cover art by

Silvia Christoph

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1. A Foggy Night

“And here is a warning to all motorists still on the coastal roads at this late hour. At the height of Malibu Beach there is dense fog, the visibility is sometimes less than fifty metres. So, friends of the night, if you want to keep the view, better drive through the mountains. For those of you for whom the night is just beginning, I’m going to play an especially hot song. Here comes—”

“Thank you, but I would have noticed the fog,” Pete muttered and switched off his car radio.

“Hey! What are you doing?” cried Kelly in disgust.

“I’m tired of music. The evening was enough for me. Besides, I have to concentrate on driving. It’s quite a soup out there.”

“Great, you’re in a bad mood. I knew it.” The girl with the bright red strands of blonde hair crossed her arms and stared intently out the side window. But after only a few seconds, she turned aggressively and said: “Can you tell me why you have to spoil my mood now?”

Pete laughed for a moment. “I’m spoiling your mood? If you only knew how hard I’m trying not to explode right now!”

“You have no reason at all!”

“I beg you. Finally we have an evening to ourselves, we want to go to the new disco in Malibu and party and dance a little and then you talk to your girlfriends for hours and leave me alone.”

“I didn’t know I was going to meet Sue and Betty,” Kelly defended herself.

“No, but a quarter of an hour would have been enough. For two hours, I stood in the corner and did nothing.” Pete had promised not to freak out, but now he didn’t bother anymore.

“Oh!” cried Kelly snottily. “When I don’t do your bidding, you get mad! Did you ever wonder how many times I wanted to go out with you lately and you couldn’t because you were always hanging around with Bob and Jupe?”

“We’re not hanging out!”

“No, I know you have your detective agency and you have cases to solve all the time. This is obviously more important than anything else. But once I meet some of my friends, all hell breaks loose. Let me tell you something, Pete Crenshaw—it’s not because of me that we hardly ever see each other these days.”

“But you were always quite enthusiastic when I told you about our investigations,” mumbled Pete.

“That was before I realized you had nothing else on your mind but your headquarters, your research and meetings. I don’t mean anything to you anymore.”

Pete was clear that anything he could say now would make Kelly mad again. Of course, saying nothing was just as bad. But he didn’t want to have this discussion anymore. It wasn’t the first time they had had it. They would never come to any conclusion, though.

It was still a distance to Rocky Beach. He decided that he would keep quiet until he dropped Kelly off at home.

Endless, nerve-wracking minutes. Pete decided to concentrate entirely on the road.

California's coastal residents—especially motorists—often had to struggle with fog at this time of year, but Pete could not remember it ever being this bad. He drove as slowly as never before on this route. The headlights of his red MG made the white walls of air glow. He could barely see more than fifty metres away. The radio host's warning had been a gross understatement. Fortunately it was so late that there was not much traffic on the roads.

It almost seemed as if they were the only people still on the road. A small car on a dark, narrow road wound its way through the countryside along the steep coast. Sometimes the fog broke, then the air was clear for a few moments and they could catch a glimpse of the sea. The ghostly fog banks drifted over the water and slowly pushed themselves up the embankment. But immediately afterwards, the view was swallowed by the grey soup again.

Kelly turned the radio back on and turned up the volume. Alanis Morissette screamed from the speakers in a shrill voice.

"Could you keep it down?" yelled Pete.

"If you won't talk to me, at least let me listen to music!"

"But not so loud!" He turned the radio down.

"Typical," hissed Kelly.

"Listen, Kelly," Pete began as calmly as possible. "It's foggy out there. If you don't want to fly down twenty metres in a high arc, I'll have to concentrate on the road. But I can't do that with all this roaring."

"That's not roaring, that's Alanis." She turned the music back up.

"I don't give a damn who that is! Would you please—"

"Look out!" Kelly's shrill scream ripped the music apart and made Pete startle.

As if from nowhere, a dark figure appeared on the road. Pete hit the brakes and dragged the steering wheel around. With squealing tyres, the car skidded and slid towards the slope. Pete tried to control over the car by clinging to the steering wheel in panic while Kelly screamed with all her might. The bonnet of the MG bored itself into the undergrowth and went a little downhill before coming to a stop.

All this had taken two seconds at most, but it had seemed like an eternity to Pete. He closed his eyes for a moment. Alanis Morissette continued to sing as if nothing had happened. Then he looked over at Kelly, "Are you all right?"

She nodded dazedly. Then she looked out the side window. "Did... did you hit that person?"

"Don't think so." Pete pushed the door open and tried to get out, but forgot the seat belt and almost strangled himself with it. When he finally got out, the road was deserted in front of him. Nightmare images immediately shot through his head. The person had jumped to the side and fallen down the slope. Or if he had hit her, then she would be lying badly injured somewhere in the brushwood.

"Hello!" cried Pete anxiously. "Where are you?"

A shadow peeked out of the fog.

"Goodness, are you all right?" Pete asked.

A woman came up to him. No limping, no moaning, she seemed unhurt.

"No, everything's okay." Pete breathed again. But as the shock subsided, he became angry. "Have you gone insane, jumping out into the road?"

"I'm sorry. I saw your headlights from afar and didn't think I was invisible because of the fog. Quick, I need witnesses!"

"Witnesses?" Kelly repeated. "For what?"

"Later," the woman replied curtly. "Do you happen to have a camera in the car?"

"No," Pete replied, irritated. "For what—"

“Damn!” She turned abruptly and ran towards the embankment. “Come on! Quick!”

“But... but where to?” Pete shouted after her.

“Down to the beach!”

“And the car?”

“Not important! Quick! Or it’ll be gone in a minute!”

Kelly and Pete looked at each other helplessly, but whatever the stranger wanted to show them, it seemed immensely important. Pete took a look at his MG. He had strayed so far from the road that he could no longer endanger the traffic.

“All right,” he murmured, ran back and got a flashlight out of the glove compartment. Then he slammed both doors shut and followed the woman with Kelly in tow.

The stranger hurried along the embankment until she found a place where the bushes revealed a small gap.

Behind it, rugged rocks led steeply downhill, but there was a path that she obviously knew well, for she climbed down without hesitation.

Much more cautious and in the light of the flashlight Kelly and Pete tried to keep up with her.

“Or else what would be gone?” gasped Kelly.

The woman did not answer.

The descent was arduous. Several times, Pete and Kelly stumbled and almost fell, while the woman jumped from rock to rock with agility as if she had done nothing else all her life. She had already reached the bottom when Pete and Kelly were still halfway between the road and the beach.

“Hurry!” she cried impatiently. “You must see it!”

They climbed as fast as they could and finally reached the wide sandy beach.

“Would you please explain what this is all about?” Pete asked indignantly. “Has there been a crime?”

“In a moment,” the woman replied and immediately started moving again. “Come on!” They followed her fifty metres towards the water. There she stopped and stared strained out to sea. “Damned fog! You can’t see a thing!”

“What?” Kelly tried again.

She did not answer, but continued to search the gaps between the fog banks. Only now Pete came to take a closer look at the stranger. She was in her mid-thirties, small and wiry and had short, dark locks. She was wearing black sweatpants, a short-sleeved black T-shirt and sneakers. On her left shoulder was a curled up snake tattoo. A jogger on the beach in the middle of the night? Slowly Pete realized how absurd this situation was. What were they doing here anyway?

“Listen,” Pete said forcefully. “Because of you, we almost went over the edge! Because of you, we almost broke every bone in our body on the descent. Now tell us what this is all about. What do you need witnesses for? What do you want us to look at?”

Again the stranger made no effort to answer, kept staring into the darkness as if she hadn’t heard Pete at all. But finally she said: “The ship. It was there. I saw it just now!”

“The ship?” Kelly echoed. “You want us to go see a ship? Listen, this is Malibu Beach! There are a thousand ships here!”

“It was not a normal ship. It... it came suddenly out of the fog. The hull and tattered sails seemed to glow.”

“A glowing ship? What do you mean?” Pete asked.

Now she finally turned to Pete. There was a look of agitation in her eyes. “It was a ghost ship!”

2. The Eavesdropper

“Juupeeterrr!” Aunt Mathilda's voice echoed unmistakably across the salvage yard.

“Oh no,” moaned Jupiter Jones, who was sitting in front of the computer at Headquarters together with Bob Andrews. “That’s gotta be work for us.”

“You don’t know that,” Bob objected. “Maybe she wants something completely different from you.”

But the First Investigator shook his head. “Dear Bob, there are three ways Aunt Mathilda calls my name... ‘Jupiter!’” He perfectly imitated his aunt’s cheerful, lilting tone and explained, “This is how she calls when mail has come for me. Because she herself loves getting mail and is automatically happy for everyone else, I suppose... Then there is number two: ‘Jupeeeter!’”

The long drawn-out call made Bob giggle. “And what is the meaning of this?”

“That dinner is ready,” the First Investigator calmly declared. “Her voice sounds friendly, but will not tolerate any contradiction. Aunt Mathilda does not want the food to get cold. At the same time there is already a hint of her expectation that I will eat everything and praise her for her great cooking skills.”

Bob started to laugh. On the one hand about Jupiter’s outstanding acting performance, on the other hand about how dynamic he explained the examples to him. “And number three?”

“We all know number three best: ‘Juupeeterrr!’ Loud, hard, demanding, without a trace of kindness—like a sergeant. That means ‘come here right now’, and it would most likely involve work.” With a sigh, he got up and opened the door to the outside. “Yes, Aunt Mathilda?”

“Are you guys gonna sit in your trailer all day again? The sun is shining!”

“The computer doesn’t need the sun.”

“The computer!” moaned Aunt Mathilda. “Of course. You’re always sitting in front of it. So when I was your age, I was always out in the fresh air!”

“Back then, you didn’t have to be afraid of skin cancer when you went out in the sun,” Jupiter defended himself.

“All lame excuses. Listen, guys. Titus will be back from a big shopping spree any minute now. You will help him unload and sort the new goods. As a reward, we’ll have cherry pie later, all right?”

It wasn’t a question. It was an order. Some time ago, The Three Investigators had promised to help at the salvage yard whenever it was necessary. In return, they were allowed to continue using the old mobile home trailer on the premises as the office for The Three Investigators. Aunt Mathilda’s promise of her first-class cherry pie for their cooperation was only a bonus.

“All right,” Jupiter said. “Come on, Bob. We’ll continue later.”

At the salvage yard, there were a number of visitors who strolled around the stalls looking for useful or useless things. On Saturdays, The Jones Salvage Yard was always particularly well attended.

A pick-up truck rumbled through the entrance, followed by a mini van. Both vehicles were loaded to the top with old furniture, boxes and cartons.

“Ah, my loyal helpers are already standing by,” cried Jupiter’s uncle Titus happily as he got out of the truck. “You can give me a hand right away.”

Aunt Mathilda came running excited. “Titus Jones! That’s half a parade!”

“A bargain, Mathilda,” assured the little man with the thick black moustache. “I’m afraid it’s a little too much for my truck. But Mr Quinn, who sold me his grandfather’s things, was kind enough to help with the transport.”

Out of the mini van came a young man with dark hair. He was taller than Bob and Jupiter—more of Pete’s height. He nodded in greeting and immediately began to unload the goods.

“No, no, Mr Quinn, the boys can handle this,” Uncle Titus said quickly. “You’ve helped me enough already. Come on, let’s go to the office, I can write you the cheque.”

Then he turned to Jupiter and Bob and said: “And you two, get to work!” He winked at them slyly, then went with Mr Quinn to the little cottage that served as the salvage yard office.

Bob looked at the mountains of goods and pulled a face. “You don’t know where to start. When Hans and Konrad were here, that was their job.”

“Well, they’re back in Germany,” Jupiter replied as he thought wistfully of the two Bavarian brothers who had worked for Uncle Titus and Aunt Mathilda at the salvage yard in the past. “But at least Pete could help! Where is he anyway?”

“He went to Malibu yesterday with Kelly to a new disco. They probably got back late and he’s still in bed.”

“That’s typical,” Jupe remarked. “Well, let’s get started.”

Under Aunt Mathilda’s watchful gaze and direction, they lifted the heavy furniture and boxes from the two loading platforms. The unloading went faster than they expected, but afterwards they were in a sweat.

“All right,” moaned Bob. “That was it.”

“Not really,” Aunt Mathilda contradicted him. “It’s only just begun!”

“Are we supposed to sort the rubbish?” Jupiter surmised.

“Right. Sort them into possible collector’s items, normal junk, things that still have to be repaired, and scrap metal, which we either throw away for good or hand it over to an artist who might make a beautiful sculpture out of it. I have to get back to the customers. Have fun, boys.” Aunt Mathilda waved cheerfully and disappeared into the office.

They opened the boxes and cartons and rummaged through them.

“What is this?” Bob said, pulling out an ugly old bedside lamp, “For this kind of stuff, you’ll never find a buyer for it, anyway.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure,” replied Jupiter. “People will buy almost anything. And they collect the craziest things. Not only stamps and coins. Once a month, for example, someone from LA comes looking for antique letter openers. And a lady from the neighbourhood regularly buys coffee pots. She once told me there are over two hundred of them in her house.”

“Two hundred coffee pots,” Bob murmured uncomprehendingly and opened another box. Inside were dozens of old hat boxes. “They must have belonged to Mr Quinn’s grandmother. What do we do with them?”

“Sell them! They still look pretty good.”

“Sure. But who needs hat boxes nowadays?” Bob asked. “Even if they looked like new, nobody would want them. Would they?”

“You never know,” said the First Investigator.

Bob grinned in agony. “No, of course you never know. But that goes for anything that’s lying around. You never know if in the next hundred years, someone will come along and

want some old car tyres. Or a foot-operated sewing machine. Or a coffee set with every cup cracked and every plate missing a corner.” He sighed. “Why is your uncle buying up all this useless stuff?”

“Because that’s why people come to us,” Jupe explained. “They know they can find something here that they can’t find anywhere else—plaster busts, animal cages, weird alarm clocks, antique mirrors and so on.”

Jupiter reached for a big cardboard box and examined its contents piece by piece. A snow globe, in which colourful plastic fish danced with white flakes when shaken, landed on the pile of ‘cheap kitsch’. Dozens of patched bicycle inner tubes went to the ‘worthless trash’ and an old coffee pot to the ‘collectibles’. “... To the lady from the neighbourhood,” explained Jupiter with a wink.

“Look, this is fancy!” Bob held up a big dusty ship in a bottle. “It looks really valuable. Anyway, it’s not one of those ready-made kits you can buy. What do you think —‘collectibles’?”

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know.”

“Hey! There’s more! The whole box is full of ships in bottles.” They looked at each other, nodded, and said at the same time, “To the ‘collectibles’.”

A middle-aged woman with a big straw hat on her head, who had been walking across the salvage yard for a few minutes and had been looking at the items, approached them. She asked uncertainly, “Are you with the salvage yard?”

Jupiter nodded. “Can I help you?”

“Well, probably not. I’ve been searching all the junk shops and flea markets in the area for weeks without finding anything. But yesterday a dealer told me to try The Jones Salvage Yard in Rocky Beach, and I might be lucky here. I’m looking for hat boxes.”

The First Investigator grinned broadly while Bob had trouble holding back his laughter.

“Excuse me, what’s so funny about that?” the woman asked indignantly.

“Sorry, nothing at all,” Jupiter replied and cleared his throat. “Of course we have hat boxes. Just arrived.” He pointed invitingly to the stack.

“Take your pick.”

“Oh!” cried the woman delightedly and immediately threw herself on the objects of her desire. “How much do they cost?”

“My aunt can tell you that. Over there in the little office building.”

Grateful and with four hat boxes under her arm she said goodbye.

“What did I tell you,” Jupiter triumphed. “People come to us when they’re looking for hat boxes.”

“Unbelievable,” Bob said, shaking his head and having to grin again. “I was almost torn apart when she started talking about hat boxes. Hey, here comes Pete. He’s gonna be so annoyed he didn’t see it.”

The Second Investigator just raced in on his mountain bike. He spotted his friends and came to a halt next to them with squeaking brakes.

“You’re just in time, Pete,” Jupiter greeted him. “Work for us!”

“Work?” Pete asked. “Don’t tell me we got a new case. This time I wanted to be the one to stumble onto something mysterious.”

“No, no, just one of the usual Aunt Mathilda jobs.”

“I’m so glad.” Pete parked his bike and said: “You won’t believe what happened to me last night.”

“You had a fight with Kelly,” Bob guessed.

The Second Investigator frowned irritably. “How do you know that?”

"You guys fight all the time!" Bob cried. "Haven't you noticed?"

"I'd say they've been arguing since they met, Bob," Jupiter smirked. "There's really nothing mysterious about that. At most, the fact that they're still together."

"Now stop it," growled Pete. "I'm talking about something completely different. Kelly and I almost ran over a jogger—a woman—on our way home yesterday."

"What?" Bob said.

"Don't get excited. Nothing happened. But that woman was completely rattled. She claimed she saw a ghost ship! Twice now! We nearly fell off the cliffs, but the ghost ship was gone and—"

"Stop," Jupiter interrupted him curtly. "Dear Pete, would you please tell us this story in detail and in chronological order?"

"Yes, yes, all right. So..." Pete took a deep breath and told his fellow detectives what happened last night.

Jupiter and Bob listened spellbound, forgetting the work that piled up in front of them in huge mountains.

"So, to summarize, the jogger jumped on the bonnet of my car, then drag us down the cliffs and gave us scary stories. In any case, we didn't see a ghost ship. And after five minutes, Kelly got annoyed. She made a big fuss and yelped at the jogger to see if she was still right in the head."

"Typical Kelly," said Jupe.

Pete didn't hear the ridicule and continued, "Anyway, Kelly was desperate to get home."

"And the jogger?" Jupe asked.

"She wanted us to stay. She told us that she had seen the ship the night before and called the police. But of course they didn't believe her. And now it had reappeared, so she ran up the road quickly to find witnesses."

"But when you arrived, it was gone," Jupiter concluded.

"Right. Poor thing. She was all upset. But then Kelly pulled me along and we went home."

"A shining ship with tattered sails," murmured the First Investigator thoughtfully.

"She called it a ghost ship," Pete added.

"How did that woman seem to you, Pete?" Jupiter asked. "What do you think? Do you think she was telling the truth?"

"She was very excited," Pete recalled. "Almost panicked. Either she was a very good actress or she really saw something scary."

"Hmm," mumbled Bob. "A strange story."

"A mystery," the First Investigator agreed. "And therefore something we should investigate further."

"I thought so. But how do you want to proceed?" Pete asked. "There's no trail we can follow. After all, the ghost ship wasn't even there."

"Well, first we should go see the night jogger," Jupe said. "Do you know where she lives, Pete?"

"I don't even know her name."

Jupiter looked at him reproachfully. "But it was very unprofessional not to ask her for her name—from a detective's point of view. All right, then we'll just have to go and look for her and her ghost ship. If it was indeed there last night and the night before last, there's a good chance it'll turn up again tonight. So we should—"

"Look out!" Pete stared at a pile of cardboard boxes that had started to move menacingly. The Second Investigator jumped forward and pushed Jupiter aside. A second later, the two

top boxes fell down—and landed crashing exactly where Jupiter had stood.

“My goodness, boy! Are you hurt?” said a voice.

“Mr Quinn! No, thank Pete.” Jupe said.

The dark-haired man had appeared behind the junk heap and looked worriedly at the First Investigator. “Oh, I’m so sorry. I... I dropped my car keys. When I bent down, I hit the cardboard tower.”

“No harm done,” Jupe said. “I hope the stuff in the boxes didn’t break.”

“No, no, I don’t think so. There wasn’t that much breakable stuff among my grandfather’s things. Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yes, I’m okay,” Jupe replied.

“Thank goodness. I... I apologize again. Goodbye!” He suddenly turned around, got into his van and drove off.

The three detectives looked at each other. “Did you notice where he came from all of a sudden?” Bob asked.

Pete shook his head. “He stood behind the boxes. We must have been so engrossed in conversation that we didn’t even notice him.”

Jupiter narrowed his eyes. “Or maybe he sneaked up on us.”

“Sneaked up on us?” Pete doubted. “Don’t you think you’re seeing ghosts? Why would he do that?”

“To eavesdrop on us.”

3. Joggers Among Themselves

“What do you know about ghost ships, Bob?”

The Three Investigators sat in Pete’s car and drove along the coast road towards Malibu. They had worked half the day at the salvage yard, but in the end all the hat boxes and coffee pots had been sorted and Aunt Mathilda’s cherry pie had comforted them over the strain.

Now the sun stood as a glowing red ball over the horizon and the crowds of people who had romped in the water today left the beaches and drove home. After sunset, it often became sensitively cold on the coast at this time of year and most people wanted to leave the road before the fog came along with the darkness to take away their view.

“There are many stories of ghost ships—at least as many as there are about haunted houses or ghosts.” Bob, the best-informed of The Three Investigators, had gone home for dinner and had leafed through his collection of old ghost stories to find anything worth knowing about ghost ships.

“Basically, there’s not much difference between these stories,” he continued. “It’s always about the souls of the dead who can’t find peace and therefore haunt the earth. And if by chance they were captains or pirates, not only their ghost appears, but a whole ghost ship.”

“There used to be a few pirates in California,” Pete murmured. Bob’s report had made him immediately uncomfortable. “Frankly, I have little desire to tangle with the ghost of a murdering and plundering pirate.”

“Step on the brakes, Pete,” Jupiter suggested.

The Second Investigator took a look at the speedometer. “What is it? I’m not driving that fast.”

Jupiter laughed. “I meant the brakes in your head! It’s not the car you should stop, but your imagination.”

“I see.” Pete blushed.

“All we have so far is the highly unbelievable testimony of a night jogger,” Juve said. “There is no mention of ghosts or pirates.”

Five minutes later, Pete drove into a parking lot.

“Was it here?” Bob asked.

“Not quite. The jogger stopped us a few hundred metres further. But you can get down to the beach better from here.”

The Three Investigators got out. From the dusty gravel yard, a wooden staircase led down to the water. Most of the bathers had already left. Now the cleaning vehicles rolled over the sand to free it from beer cans and empty chip bags.

Pete led them to the spot where he had stumbled down the steep slope with Kelly last night. “We were up there.”

“So what do we do now?” Bob wanted to know. “Wait until it’s dark and the ghost ship shows up?”

“It was midnight last night,” Pete pondered. “We could be waiting a long time.”

“We will try to track down the jogger,” Jupiter suggested.

“And how? There are thousands of joggers here every day.”

“All the better. Let’s just ask one of them.” The First Investigator pointed towards the water where some people were walking along and started to move. A woman in neon yellow sportswear and a bobbing ponytail jogged towards them.

“Excuse me, could you tell us if you could—” She ran past Jupiter without even looking at him.

He shrugged his shoulders and tried again, this time it was a man coming from the other direction. “Excuse me, we are looking for a—” Again, Jupiter was ignored. “What’s going on here?”

“Golden Jogging Rule Number One,” Pete explained. “Never let yourself get out of your rhythm. And if someone interrupts you while you’re running, just ignore them.”

“Great,” Jupiter moaned. “I always knew that athletes are unfriendly people.”

“Not if you agree to their terms,” Pete replied.

“What do you mean?”

“Wait and see!” The Second Investigator waited for the next jogger—a tanned young man with long hair—and started jogging beside him. Pete had no trouble keeping up. “Excuse me, do you run here often?”

The man gave him a sceptical look. “Every evening,” he replied curtly so as not to lose his breath.

“My friends and I are looking for someone. A woman in her thirties, short dark hair. She has a tattoo on her left upper arm—a snake. Perhaps you know her?”

“Too many people here.”

“Hmm. Too bad. Thanks anyway.” Pete stopped, waited a moment and ran in the opposite direction with a young woman. She was a little more talkative.

“I don’t know who you mean,” she replied to Pete’s question. “But I know someone who could help you.”

“Really?”

“Here on the coast lives a woman who spends half the day sitting on her terrace watching people. Sometimes she uses binoculars and I have the impression that she keeps a book about the people who are at the beach. I wouldn’t be surprised if she knew who you meant.”

“That sounds good. Where does she live?”

“Over there, behind the rock, very near the lighthouse. You can’t see the house from here, but it’s not far.”

“We’ll try her. Thank you!”

The young woman smiled at him and ran on while Pete slowly returned to his friends.

“Very impressive,” mocked Jupiter. “Joggers among themselves. That would be a topic for a social science study. Do you know the secret jogger hand signal or why did they talk to you?”

“You’re the envy of the world,” said the Second Investigator. “Because you know that you would have collapsed from exhaustion after only 10 metres, and therefore never get the chance to flirt with pretty joggers.”

Before Jupiter could tease back—and he would have done so, because usually Jupiter Jones always had the last word—Pete quickly reported what he had learned from the young woman.

“A typical curious neighbour,” pondered Jupiter as they made their way to the rock. “Let’s see if we’re dealing with a Category A or Category B lady.”

“Category A or B? What does that mean now?” Bob asked without understanding.

“Category A is for ‘clingy’ or ‘pushy’. She sits on the terrace all day long because she is lonely and is happy about every visit. She will invite us for tea even though she doesn’t know

us at all, and she will tell us about her daily observations for hours, whether we want to hear them or not.”

Pete smiled. “And Category B?”

“Category B is for ‘insulting’. She’s a real spitfire, and so bitter that she’ll scare off anyone who comes near her property with rude words and a shotgun.”

The house appeared behind the dark rock. It wasn’t very big, but from a distance it looked quite noble. It was not surprising. Whoever lived in Malibu Beach, even more so directly on the beach, had money. The terrace was well visible, but The Three Investigators didn’t find anyone sitting there, armed with binoculars, watching the people. Probably it was nothing much more to see on the beach.

There was a light burning behind the windows. Bob was the first to notice. He squinted, stared at the house and finally stopped.

“Bob? What is it?” Pete said.

“Oh, my goodness,” Bob groaned. Then a grin crept up on his face.

“What’s wrong?” Pete asked.

“Don’t you see?” Bob said.

“What?” Pete said.

“You don’t recognize that house?” Bob exclaimed. “The lady who lives there is not in Category A or B. She has a category all to herself—Category E. E as in ‘earthquake’.

“E for Elenor Madigan!”

4. Category E

At this name, Jupiter and Pete flinched. Elenor Madigan! She was the great-aunt of Pete's girlfriend Kelly and had hired The Three Investigators some time ago to look for a missing amulet. They had spent days in Aunt Elenor's house and had let themselves be bullied by her until it turned out in the end that the supposedly lost amulet had been in her safe deposit box all the time. Elenor Madigan had simply forgotten about it. Pete had called her an 'earthquake' because of her loud and intrusive nature.

"Really, Aunt Elenor," the Second Investigator remarked with a tortured face. "I had already forgotten that she lived here."

Jupiter laughed. "She watches the beach goers. That suits her. Well, fellas, let's pay Miss Madigan a visit." He started to move.

"Wait a minute!" Pete tried to hold him back. "You don't want to go there."

"But of course! She can help us. And she knows that after that amulet story from that time she still owes us a favour. Nothing better could ever happen to us!"

"I would rather say nothing worse can happen to us! That woman is..." Pete was at a loss for words.

"Come on, Pete, get that chip off your shoulder," Bob said conciliatory. "You don't have to buddy up with her. We'll ask her about the mystery jogger and then we'll get out of here."

They went back to the stairs and walked a short distance to Elenor Madigan's house. By now it had almost become dark, but the house could not be missed. For one thing, it stood very close to the lighthouse. On the other hand, the front garden was full of all kinds of curiosities that magically attracted the eyes of passing walkers. Miss Madigan collected everything that came between her fingers and had enriched her garden with a few more pieces since the last visit of The Three Investigators. Nest to the garden gnome were some pink plastic angels.

Pete made one last attempt. "Do you really think that—"

Jupiter did not let him finish and rang the bell. The last time the gong had played the well-known melody of London's Big Ben, this time the dramatic first notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony echoed to them. At the same moment, something inside the house squeaked. It sounded like: 'Yipp! Yipp! Yipp!'

The Second Investigator hid the face in his hands. "Now she has a lapdog. I'm not gonna survive this."

The door opened. In front of them stood a chubby woman in her early sixties, dressed in brightly coloured, airy robes. Her hair, which had been teased, shone in a deep purple. In her arms she held a small, dishevelled something that barked incessantly.

For a second, she stood facing them frowning, but then she recognized them and whispered: "Jupiter, Pete and Rob! What a surprise!"

"Bob," Bob corrected her.

"Good evening, Miss Madigan," Jupiter began as kindly as possible. "We—"

"How nice of you to come and visit me! Come in, I say, come in!"

"We really don't want to bother you—"

“But no, you’re not bothering me at all! I’m always happy to have visitors. Come on in!” She gave them no choice.

“Subcategory A,” Bob hissed grinning as they entered the kitschy house.

In no time at all, she had made tea and persuaded The Three Investigators to have a cup. All the while, she carried the dog, who wouldn’t stop barking, in her arms.

“Have you met my new companion?” Proudly, she reached out to them with a ball of fur. Somewhere a tongue was sticking out. “This is Muffins. Isn’t he adorable? You’ll have to stop barking now, my little baby bear.”

“Miss Madigan, we need your help,” Jupiter tried again. “That’s why we’re here.”

“But of course, but of course! I’ll help whenever I can! What’s it all about? A new case? But hopefully not another missing amulet! Ha ha!” She threw her head back and laughed.

“We’re looking for a young woman who often jogs on the beach late at night,” Bob said. “We thought perhaps you might be, uh... might know her. After all, you live right on the beach and you—”

She interrupted him. “You’re fun, Rob. A thousand people come to the beach here every day! How am I supposed to recognize anybody? Muffins, darling, be quiet. I never watch the goings-on down there.”

Pete suppressed a giggle.

“The woman we are looking for has a rather conspicuous tattoo on her arm—a snake,” said Jupiter. “Perhaps you have seen her before.”

Elenor Madigan’s face suddenly darkened. “Short, black hair?”

Jupiter nodded.

“Deborah Snell. She lives a few houses down the road, right next to the lighthouse. An unpleasant person, very unpleasant... And odd. She always walks along the waterfront at night. What do you want with her?”

“Do you know her better?” Jupiter evaded the question.

“No. And I don’t care about it at all.”

“What makes her so unpleasant?” Jupe continued.

Miss Madigan raised her eyebrows in a gloomy way. “She never greets.”

Jupiter cleared his throat. “Well...”

“And she has a relationship with the lighthouse keeper,” she added sharply. “She thinks the neighbours don’t know about it, but it’s obvious!”

“Goodness, it’s so late!” Pete stepped in and looked at his watch in horror. “I’m sorry, Miss Madigan, but I have an appointment with Kelly. And if I don’t want to upset her, we have to leave now.”

They could clearly see Aunt Elenor’s disappointment.

“Oh, that’s too bad! Right, Muffins? But I wouldn’t want my Kelly to have to wait. Give her my love.” She escorted The Three Investigators to the door.

“That reminds me, Miss Madigan,” Jupiter said. “Have you noticed anything unusual on the beach these past few nights? Or out in the sea?”

“Something extraordinary? No, not that I know of,” she replied. “For one week, it is so foggy that sometimes you can’t even see out to the water from here. Does this have something to do with a new case? Oh, I’m always so excited to hear what Kelly tells me about you.”

“Just a thought,” the First Investigator interrupted before Aunt Elenor could lapse into an endless monologue. “Thank you very much! Goodbye!”

“Goodbye!” she whispered and Muffins barked a little louder.

“Phew!” moaned Pete as they left the front yard. “It was almost unbearable. Aunt Elenor alone was enough to drive me crazy, but now she has a yippity-yappity dog!”

“Tell me, are you really on a date with Kelly?” Bob asked.

Pete smiled. “Of course not. I just wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible. And that was the only excuse Aunt Elenor would accept.”

“Well done, Pete,” praised Jupiter. “I couldn’t have borne the chattering and barking much longer either. And now on to Deborah Snell! I’m curious what she’ll tell us!”

In the meantime, it had become very dark. The fog slowly rose and crept over the sea to the coast. It was not far to the lighthouse which was already in operation and tirelessly sent a beam of light on its round trip. Not far away, a house stood in stark contrast to all the villas in the area. It was a plain, small bungalow. Behind the windows, there was a light.

They stepped to the door and Jupiter rang the bell. A few moments later, a small dark-haired woman opened the door. She looked at them suspiciously.

“Excuse me,” Jupiter began. “Are you Deborah Snell?”

Her gaze lingered on Pete. “W... what?” she stuttered in an uncertain voice.

“Sorry to disturb you,” Pete took the floor. “Do you recognize me? You stopped me and my girlfriend last night and took us to the beach.”

“What do you want?” she asked curtly.

“We would like to talk to you about the incident yesterday. You know, the ghost ship.”

“Ghost ship? What are you talking about?”

The Second Investigator frowned. “You were on the beach last night, weren’t you?”

“On the beach? I’m never on the beach at night!”

“But... but you are Deborah Snell?”

Without answering, she slammed the front door shut.

5. Another Witness

For seconds, The Three Investigators stared at the door.

“That’s the last straw!” Pete cried and pressed the bell.

“Get out of here! Or I’ll call the police,” Miss Snell’s voice echoed from the house.

Pete wanted to ring again, but the First Investigator held him back. “Leave it. We don’t want to bother anybody.”

“But—” Pete began.

“Come on!” Jupiter pulled him away by the arm. When they were out of earshot, he asked, “Was that really the woman who stopped you yesterday?”

“One hundred percent! Didn’t you see the tattoo?” Pete said.

“Then it was Deborah Snell,” Jupe affirmed. “Because Aunt Elenor knows her neighbours, I’m sure.”

“Then why did she say she never goes to the beach at night?” Bob asked.

“I don’t know,” Pete replied. “Yesterday she was all excited to show us her ghost ship, and today she acts as if she doesn’t know what I’m talking about. Very mysterious.”

“Indeed,” Jupiter agreed. “Come, fellas, let’s go down to the water. Maybe we’ll find an answer there.”

The beach was deserted in the meantime. The ever denser fog carried the sounds further than normal air, so the splashing of the waves seemed unusually loud. The Three Investigators stared strained into the darkness, but out there at sea, nothing moved. The people, who usually travelled deep into the night with their party boats and small ships, shied away from the fog. It was dangerous to go out in this weather. Slowly the three of them strolled along the beach and talked about the incident.

“I can’t shake the feeling that Miss Snell lied under duress earlier,” Jupiter said.

“Really?” doubted Pete. “It seemed to me rather as if she had realized she was wrong and the alleged ghost ship was something completely harmless—a strangely-shaped fog bank or something.”

“But she could have told you that,” Jupe said.

“Maybe she was embarrassed,” Pete suggested.

“So there is no ghost ship at all,” Bob summed it up. “Then we might as well go home. I’m getting cold.”

Jupiter looked at his watch. “But it’s not as late as yesterday when Pete and Kelly were here.”

“So what? You really think that ship is still going to show up?” Bob remarked. “And if it does, it’s so foggy we couldn’t see it even if it was right under our noses.”

“Yeah, weird, isn’t it?” Jupiter pinched his lower lip. “It’s been foggy for days. Yet Deborah Snell claims to have seen the ship twice. Don’t you find that odd?”

“I tell you, she was wrong,” Pete repeated. “Can we go home now? It’s already eleven. I’m tired. I need to catch up on some sleep from last night.”

Jupiter reluctantly pulled a face, but finally gave in. “All right. Let’s go back.”

The next afternoon, The Three Investigators were sitting at Headquarters when Aunt Mathilda called for them.

"Not again!" moaned Bob. "Can't a man have a moment's peace?"

"But that was not the work call, but rather the post call," Jupiter remarked.

"Mail? On Sunday?"

"Maybe it's something else." Jupiter got up and opened the door to the outside. "Yes, Aunt Mathilda?"

"You have a visitor," she shouted from the salvage yard office.

A tall young man with dark hair walked across the salvage yard towards Headquarters. It took Jupiter a moment to recognize him. "Mr Quinn!" He left the trailer and Pete and Bob followed him curiously.

"You remember me?" Mr Quinn said. "You're Jupiter Jones, aren't you?"

Jupe nodded. "And these are my friends, Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews. What can I do for you?"

"Your aunt told me I'd find you here." Mr Quinn looked them with uncertainty and didn't seem to know how to start. Stuttering, he continued. "I would like to talk to you."

"What's this all about?" Jupe asked.

"I dropped my key yesterday, remember?" Mr Quinn started. "Around the boxes..."

Jupiter nodded slowly.

"When I looked for it among the boxes, I overheard you talking. I... I didn't mean to eavesdrop, I really didn't. It was a stupid coincidence."

"What about it?" Jupe prompted.

"Well... You were saying something about a jogger. And a... a ship," Mr Quinn said.

"Right," Bob said. He was somewhat suspicious of the visitor.

"I also had an encounter with a jogger on the beach. And I saw the ship."

"Excuse me?" cried Pete.

"In Malibu Beach. In the middle of the night."

"Hold on!" Jupiter raised his hand to signal that they should wait, went to Headquarters and came back with four folding chairs. "Sit down!" he asked. "And tell us from the beginning what happened."

"All right." Quinn cleared his throat. "I work in a restaurant in Malibu as a chef. Last night, I went home after work."

"On the coast road towards Rocky Beach," Jupiter suspected.

Mr Quinn looked irritated. "Correct. How did you..."

"Go on, Mr Quinn, I'll explain later," Jupe said.

"It was very foggy. Suddenly a woman ran straight into the road and got in my way."

"She had a snake tattooed on her shoulder, didn't she?" Jupiter raised his hands apologetically when he saw Mr Quinn's astonished face. "Excuse me, I won't interrupt you again."

Confused, the visitor continued: "I was able to brake my car just in time and got out. She was very excited and told me to come along, she needed witnesses. I didn't know what it was all about and thought that maybe a crime had happened, so I followed her down to the beach. She pointed to the water. I couldn't see at first because the fog was so thick. But then a bank of fog drifted away and... and a ship appeared."

"What did the ship look like?" Bob asked when Quinn paused.

"An old sailing ship. I... I don't know much about ships."

"And what's so unusual about that?" Jupiter played the innocent. "There are many sailing ships around here. Mostly they are used for tourists or for advertising purposes, but—"

“It wasn’t an ordinary ship!” interrupted in Quinn. “The sails were completely broken, and yet it moved on. And it... it glowed! It was glowing!”

“It glowed?” Pete repeated.

“The whole ship! The hull, the sails—everything! I know it sounds crazy. And if I hadn’t seen it myself, I wouldn’t believe it. But the ship looked like it didn’t come from this world. Like a giant ghost.” Quinn had turned pale.

“And then what happened?” Bob wanted to know.

“The ship drifted silently through the fog. We stared at it and waited. I’m not sure for how long. At some point... it suddenly disappeared.”

Jupiter frowned. “You mean it disappeared in the fog?”

“No! No, not at all!” Quinn exclaimed. “It... it just disintegrated! How shall I describe it? It’s like smoke disappearing. It was frightening. The jogger got so scared that she ran away. I looked for her, but she was gone. Then I went back to my car and drove home. I didn’t get a wink of sleep last night. Then I suddenly remembered the conversation you had yesterday. And that’s why I’m here. What do you know? Did you see the ship too?” He looked at the three of them.

“No,” Pete replied. “But I had almost the same experience as you the day before.” He told Mr Quinn about his meeting with Deborah Snell and their strange encounter yesterday afternoon. “She claimed never to jog at night. But yesterday she ran in front of your car. Very mysterious.”

“Indeed,” Jupiter agreed. “Mr Quinn, do you know what time it was when you saw the ghost ship?”

“Shortly after midnight,” was the prompt answer. “Because the kitchen closes at 12 midnight sharp—the witching hour.”

“We left an hour too early.” Jupiter was annoyed.

“It sounds like you’re really investigating,” Mr Quinn remarked.

“We do too,” replied Jupiter proudly. “May I show you our card?” He pulled a business card from his pocket and handed it to Mr Quinn. It said:



“Investigators?” Mr Quinn said. “Then I did hear correctly. You said something yesterday about investigations. Are you... are you real detectives? I mean, you’re still pretty young.”

“Age fortunately has nothing to do with detective abilities,” replied Jupiter without a trace of modesty. “We have already solved a number of mysterious cases.”

“What do the question marks on the card mean?”

“They are our corporate symbol. The question mark stands for unanswered questions and unsolved riddles—like that ghost ship story. If you use our services, we’ll try to solve the mystery.”

“With pleasure. How much is your fee?” Mr Quinn asked.

“We don’t take money,” Bob said. “If we get answers to our questions, that would be our reward.” Smiling, he added: “But you are of course welcome to invite us for a meal in your restaurant when the case is closed.”

“Of course. Then I would like to engage your services.”

Jupiter nodded contentedly. “A new case for The Three Investigators.”

6. Hunt for the Ghost Ship

“The fog is getting thicker. It’s amazing how fast it comes,” Pete remarked.

The Three Investigators sat in the sand and looked out at the fog banks that slowly formed on the horizon. The sun had already set. Immediately after Mr Quinn’s visit, they had decided to spend the night on the beach and had gone to Malibu again on Pete’s MG. Mr Quinn wanted to join them, but he hadn’t shown up yet.

“Hopefully it won’t be too late,” Bob said. “I have chemistry in the first two hours tomorrow. I don’t want my parents to know I’m going to be gone that long. I told them I was spending the night at your place, Jupe.”

The First Investigator was distracted. “You hear that? An engine noise. That must be it!”

The place where Mr Quinn worked was right by the ocean. His boss owned a small boat with an external motor. Quinn had borrowed it for the evening. The chugging of the engine slowly came closer. Jupiter took the flashlight out of his backpack, in which they had stored the rest of the equipment for tracking the ghost ship. He used the flashlight to give light signals to the boat.

“I still don’t think this is a good idea,” Pete remarked. “We’re going after a full-grown sailing ship with this small boat?”

The little boat ran aground, Mr Quinn climbed out and approached The Three Investigators.

“Hello, you three.”

“Good evening, Mr Quinn.”

“Do you really think it’s a good idea with this boat, Jupiter?” Mr Quinn asked.

“That’s exactly what I just said, Mr Quinn,” Pete reiterated. “But Jupiter is stubborn. Once he gets something into his head, you can talk your head off. It doesn’t change anything.”

“If this ghost ship really exists, we must pursue it,” the First Investigator defended himself. “And we will try to get aboard.”

“We’ll what?” cried Pete in horror.

“This... this is news to me, Jupe,” Bob said.

“What did you think?” Jupe argued. “That we would just watch it from a distance? It’s not gonna do us any good.”

“But we brought the binoculars and the camera specially for that!” Pete threw in.

“So what? In case of doubt, photos are only of limited evidential value. If we want to find out what kind of ship it is, we have to get on board,” Jupiter insisted.

“And... and what about the ghosts?” Pete asked.

Jupiter rolled his eyes. “Pete! There are no ghosts!”

“Okay,” he murmured. “But ghost ships... I find them just as scary.”

“I think Pete is right,” said Mr Quinn. “It’s dangerous to go out in the fog. It’s easy to lose your bearings. I don’t want you to put yourself in danger because of me. I’d never forgive myself if anything happened to you.”

“Mr Quinn, we promised you we’d solve the mystery of the ghost ship,” Jupiter explained. “To do that, we have to take a few small risks. I wonder if Deborah Snell will do

the same and turn up tonight. Or is she too scared to show up?"

They sat down together in the sand and waited. Bob kept turning and looking up at the cliff.

"Aunt Elenor just went to bed," he said with a grin at one point. "She turned out the light." He looked at his watch. "It's almost twelve. Now I'm curious."

"There is no trace of our mysterious jogger," Jupiter noted.

"But the fog has become really thick," Pete murmured and looked out to the sea.

The cone of light from the lighthouse constantly scanned the grey swaths and let them glow. But there were always black holes in the billowing air through which they could see the water glittering. Sometimes they thought they saw a shadow. But each time it was just a trick played on them by the fog and the signal lights from the lighthouse.

Then suddenly something white in the fog lit up. At first, it was so faint that Pete thought it was a light reflex on the water, but it quickly became brighter. And it was big... Very big.

"There... there it is," exclaimed Pete. "Look! The ghost ship!"

Abruptly all four stood up.

"Really!" breathed Bob. "Incredible."

Slowly the shape of the ship became visible. It was a big three-master like those from pirate movies. The sails hung in tatters and moved slightly in the light breeze. The whole ship glowed in ghostly white and illuminated the fog like a spotlight. It was a good two hundred metres away and glided majestically and silently through the night sea.

Bob was the first to free himself from his stiffness and in no time at all, he pulled the binoculars out of his backpack.

"Can you see anything? Are there people on board?"

"I don't know. I don't see anyone," Bob said. "But there! At the top of the middle mast, a small flag flutters! A skull and crossbones."

"Holy cow, a pirate ship!" Pete took it away. "Come on, let's get out of here!"

"No way, we're going there!" Jupiter decided and climbed into the boat. "What, are you going to stay here?"

"I... I'd rather stay here," said Mr Quinn.

"Me too!" cried Pete quickly. "After all, someone has to protect our client and get help if necessary."

Jupiter sighed. "Bob! Come on, hurry!"

Bob jumped into the boat and Pete pushed it into the water.

"Can you handle this?" Quinn asked them.

"Don't worry. We are seaworthy," assured Jupiter, started the engine and steered the boat out into the open water. "My goodness, that boat is not fast enough! We'll never catch that ship!"

"We'd have to," Bob said. "How can it even move forward? The sails are gone! And there's no current that strong here, to my knowledge."

"One of half a dozen riddles," Juve remarked. "Go on, take photos. We need proof!"

"Bummer, another fog bank's moving in," Bob said as he snapped. "But it still shines through the soup."

They slowly approached and could now also see the rudder holes and cannon embrasures. But no one showed up on board.

"Tell me, is it just me, or is the ship turning?" Jupiter asked.

"You're right, Juve," Bob replied. "It's turning slowly."

"It's like it's trying to escape from us. They've spotted us!"

"They? But there's nobody on board, Juve!"

The First Investigator did not answer. He stared intently at the fog that was slowly disappearing. Soon they had a clear view of the pirate ship again. They were only about eighty metres away. In the meantime, it had turned its stern towards them and picked up speed.

"It's getting away!" cried Bob. "How can it move without sails?"

"We'll find out when we catch up," Jupiter insisted.

Bob squinting his eyes together. "This may take some time. We're just getting closer very slowly."

The ghostly ship ploughed silently through the calm sea, while the two detectives' rattling boat was shaken violently by the waves. Nevertheless, they moved closer to the three-master metre by metre. Again and again, fog banks slipped between them, but the ship shone through the humid air like a lantern.

Bob again lifted the binoculars to his eyes. "Still no one there. Stop! There's someone on deck!"

"Can you see him?"

Bob did not answer.

"Hey, Bob! What's up?"

Bob had turned pale. "It... it's a... a skeleton!"

"What? A skeleton?" Jupiter put the rudder in his colleague's hand and took the binoculars himself.

His breath faltered. There was indeed a pale, scrawny figure standing by the railing, looking over at them. He narrowed his eyes and recognized a bald skull, black eye sockets and a grinning mouth. The chest was only bone. It was a skeleton. Suddenly it moved and nodded at them. Jupiter flinched and almost fell overboard.

"We're almost there!" Bob ripped him out of his horror. "It's forty metres, tops!" Suddenly the pirate ship's glow faded. "Wait a minute! What happens now? It's disappearing!"

"Impossible, Bob."

"Look! The view is very clear and yet it is becoming more and more... more and more transparent! Step on it, Juve."

"I'm sorry, that's all the engine will give."

They were still catching up, but the ship was losing substance. It was like Mr Quinn said, it was disappearing into thin air! Finally, it disappeared into the darkness.

"It's gone!" cried Bob. "It's just gone!"

"And it hasn't disappeared in the fog, that much is certain," Jupiter added, stunned. "Get the flashlight out!"

Bob grabbed the flashlight and shone to where the ghost ship had been a few seconds ago, but the light was reflected by the fog, so they only saw a diffuse bright spot in the air. Jupiter switched off the engine.

"Hey! What are you doing?" Bob exclaimed.

"Shh! If we can't see the ship, maybe we can at least hear it."

They listened. But besides the sound of the waves, there was silence.

"It's no use, Juve. It's gone. Let's turn back."

"Turn around?" Jupiter pulled a wry face. "We can't just give up!"

"What do you want to do instead? Wander aimlessly on the sea? The ship is gone!"

Unconsciously, the First Investigator looked into the darkness, then reluctantly turned away.

"You're right. All right, let's go back to the beach."

He turned to search the coast for Pete and Mr Quinn. They were gone. And so had the beach. All around them was fog and the open sea.

7. By a Hair's Breadth

"Where's Malibu Beach?" Jupe asked.

"Behind us?" Bob replied timidly.

"And where is behind us?"

"There," Bob claimed and pointed beyond the engine of the boat into the fog.

"Are you sure? What if the ghost ship made a slight turn? Or a current has turned us around? Maybe the Pacific Ocean is behind us, not the coast." Jupiter frowned at him. "We are such idiots! Every child knows that you cannot go out without a compass. Especially at night and in fog."

Bob's face lightened up. "What about the lighthouse?"

"Do you see one?" Jupiter made a gesture out into the void.

The beacon was nowhere to be seen. Bob kept trying to smile.

"At some point, the view becomes clearer and the lighthouse would reappear," he said with conviction. "That's just how long we have to wait." He squatted on the seat and looked out into the darkness.

Jupiter remained standing for a while, but then he sat down too. Bob was right—they could only wait until the fog had cleared.

"Jupe?"

"Huh?"

"How do you explain what we just saw?"

"So far, not at all," Jupe said. "It's a mystery to me how that ship could have just disappeared."

"And what will we do next?"

"Develop the photos. Maybe they show us something we missed. That will be your task first thing tomorrow—assuming we ever get back on land."

"Let's go!" cried Bob, pointing into the darkness. The wind had torn a hole in the fog, where now they could see the signal of the lighthouse.

"Thank goodness!" sighed Jupiter and immediately started the engine. "We must hurry before the hole disappears again." Slowly the boat chugged away.

Jupiter cleverly directed it towards the lighthouse. Soon they had come so close that even the humid air was no longer enough to block their view. Nevertheless, the closer they came to the lighthouse, the more the First Investigator lost confidence. Something was not right. An ominous premonition was haunting him.

"Say, Bob, don't you think that—"

"That this beacon looks different somehow?"

"Exactly," Jupe affirmed.

"I thought it was an optical illusion. But you noticed it too," Bob added. "It's not bright enough, is it?"

Jupiter narrowed his eyes. "I'd rather say it's not high enough. The lighthouse suddenly seems much smaller... unless..."

"Unless what?" Bob asked.

"This is not the Malibu Beach Lighthouse!" Jupiter quipped.

Bob was about to start a surprised answer when he heard a noise—a muffled humming that quickly grew louder and came closer. “What... what is that?”

Before Jupiter could answer, he was suddenly blinded from the side. A bright beam of light cut through the fog and rushed towards them. The chugging of the engine was drowned out by the clatter of a much larger machine.

“A yacht!” cried Bob in horror. “Dodge it fast!”

The First Investigator pulled the rudder hard around, but the boat was much too slow. The razor-sharp bow of a large motor yacht pierced the billowing air. It ploughed through the waves and headed straight for them.

“Look out!” cried Jupiter. It was too late to take any countermeasures.

Suddenly, a foghorn boomed as the yacht approached them. The bow stomped past them by a hair’s breadth. The small boat swayed so much in the turbulent water that Jupiter clawed at the side of the boat in panic.

A huge wave swept over the boat and soaked it from top to bottom as the long hull of the yacht slid by. They could read the name—*Rainbow*.

The sound of the engines died down. A bright spotlight flashed up and searched the water surface until it had Jupiter and Bob in its sights.

A rough female voice shouted: “Have you gone completely insane! We almost ran into you!”

“Sorry, ma’am, we—” Jupiter started to say.

“What are you doing out here in the middle of the night?” The woman was invisible against the blinding light.

“We wanted to go back to the coast and we directed ourselves towards this lighthouse,” Jupiter avoided a direct answer.

“Then you are on the wrong track! This lighthouse stands on an island—the ‘Hook’. To get to the coast you have to go in the other direction! Don’t you have a compass?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“You’re a danger to all shipping, you know that? Our best bet is to tow you to Malibu Beach until you can see the lighthouse.”

“That would be very nice of you.”

They could hear her disappear over the deck of the yacht. A few moments later, she came back and out of the black void behind the bright spotlight a rope flew to them. Bob cleverly caught it and tied it to the boat.

“Thank you very much!” Jupiter shouted. “Tell me, have you noticed anything unusual out here tonight?”

“Yes,” growled the woman. “Two crazy guys on a suicide squad.” Then she quickly stomped off.

Shortly afterwards the engine started and the *Rainbow* turned slowly. When it was on the right course, it accelerated and pulled Jupiter and Bob in tow to the coast.

“Bummer! Why did they take the binoculars? Now we can’t even look for them! How long have they been gone now?”

Mr Quinn looked at his watch. “Twenty minutes.”

“Twenty minutes! Hope nothing’s happened to them!” Pete walked restlessly up and down the beach. They had seen the ghost ship disappear. Shortly afterwards, Bob and Jupiter had been swallowed by a wall of fog and had not reappeared. Darkness lay before them. No ship, no boat. What happened out there?

“Perhaps we should report a missing boat to the coast guard,” Mr Quinn suggested.

Pete looked at him in surprise. He himself became nervous quickly and tended to make hasty decisions, especially in tricky situations. But Mr Quinn seemed to surpass him in this respect.

“No, better not. Jupiter would tear my head off if we acted rashly. I’m sure they’ll be back any minute.”

“They’re lost in the fog and can’t find their way back,” Quinn insisted “They’re driven further and further out to sea. Even in this weather, the big cargo ships are cruising there. They can easily overlook the boat. The two of them don’t even have a horn with them to draw attention to themselves! We should never have let them sail out! We should have—”

“Mr Quinn!” Pete stopped his ranting forcefully. “Don’t panic! Nothing’s gonna happen!” He wondered at his own words. Wasn’t that usually Jupiter’s line? Hadn’t Pete always been the one who worried too much? The Second Investigator was still trying to figure out what else to say when Mr Quinn raised his hand.

“You hear that? Engine noise!”

Pete listened. “That’s them!” Soon after, the silhouette of the small motorboat emerged from the fog and Bob’s cries echoed across the water.

“Here!” cried Pete and guided the two of them to their location with the flashlight. Finally the boat slid onto the wet sand. “Thank goodness you’re here.”

“We thought you’d been hit by a ship,” Mr Quinn added.

“We almost were,” Jupiter answered and climbed out. “And not only that. We saw a sailing ship disappear into thin air right before our eyes.”

Mr Quinn turned pale.

“Tell me,” Pete asked curiously and his friends took turns telling about their experiences.

“This is not right,” stammered Mr Quinn. “We... we have to go to the police!”

“Why go to the police?” Jupe objected. “There is no crime. And besides, they wouldn’t believe us there.”

“But... but what else can we do?” Mr Quinn asked. “What happens now? What happens next?”

“We must try again,” replied the First Investigator. “If I am not mistaken, the ghost ship will surface again tomorrow night.”

“I’d be interested to know what is the island we mistakenly thought was the mainland,” Bob said. “The ghost ship must have disappeared very near them. Is it inhabited?”

“The ‘Hook’? As far as I know, it’s not much more than a big rock in the water,” explained Jupiter. “The island is shaped like a sickle, hence the name. I believe it’s privately owned.”

Quinn nodded. “A small house stands on it. My late grandfather, whose things I sold to your uncle, knew the occupant.”

“Then we should interview this resident tomorrow,” Jupiter decided. “If anyone other than us and Deborah Snell has seen the ship, it is most likely him.”

“It’ll be a busy day,” Pete surmised.

“And that’s why we should get going so we can be fit for tomorrow,” Bob thought.

Mr Quinn was visibly irritated at how quickly The Three Investigators had made new plans. “That’s... that’s it?”

“For today yes,” replied Jupiter. “There is nothing more we can do now. You should go home as well, Mr Quinn. We’ll get back to you as soon as we know something new.”

Mr Quinn got into the boat and chugged away while The Three Investigators returned to the road.

“Hey, how about we drop in on Miss Snell for a minute?” Bob suggested.

“Good idea, Bob,” Jupiter thought. They made the small detour, but there was no light behind the windows of the bungalow, so they didn’t ring the bell.

“Either she’s not there or she’s already asleep,” concluded the First Investigator.

“Anyway, both explain why she wasn’t at the beach today. Let’s put off talking to her until tomorrow. Come on, let’s go home.”

8. The 'Hook'

"I don't know... do we really want to hunt the ghost ship tomorrow again?" Pete asked on the return trip. "Today's adventure has already taken the last nerve out of me."

"Why? You weren't even there."

"Nevertheless. I'm satisfied with what I saw from the beach. The ship has disappeared! How can you go after something that can disappear into thin air?"

"Whatever it did, it certainly didn't vanish into thin air!" claimed Jupiter. "There is a logical explanation for everything."

"Well, I'll be damned," Pete remarked.

"Fellas!" Bob interrupted the conversation. "Before you discuss this any further, I think you should take a look behind you."

Pete looked in the rear-view mirror. "Fog," he said. "And two headlights. So what?"

"That car has been behind us for quite some time," Bob explained. "As a matter of fact, since we started driving."

"We're being followed?" Pete cried, startled.

"Perhaps just a coincidence," pondered Jupiter. "Turn left at the next opportunity, then we'll know for sure."

The Second Investigator put the turn signal on and drove into a small side street. He never took his eyes off the mirror.

"The car is still behind us," he said, half angry, half afraid. "Now what?"

"Lose him!" Jupe said.

"You're funny! If you expect me to accelerate in this bad visibility and heat up the streets, you're crazy."

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. "The fog might be of use to us."

"How so?"

"By disappearing into the fog and suddenly turning off the lights."

Pete sighed. "Why am I always in the driver's seat when something like this happens to us? All right, let's move on to the next fog bank."

He steered the car back to the coast road where the fog was thickest. Slowly, so that the pursuer didn't notice, he increased the speed and gradually increased the distance between them. Then came a tight bend and for a few seconds the pursuer's headlights disappeared from the rear-view mirror.

"Now!" cried Bob from the back seat when the pursuer could no longer see them.

The Second Investigator stepped on the brakes and turned the MG onto the road shoulder. He switched off the lights as the car slid over the gravel and came to a stop. They were in total darkness. "Damn it! I can't see a thing!" Immediately Pete became nervous.

A few seconds later, their pursuer drove past them.

"Brilliant idea, Jupe," growled Pete. "Just turn off the lights, great."

"It worked, didn't it?" Jupiter defended himself. "We lost him."

"This is the second time in forty-eight hours that I drove off the road. This shouldn't become a habit!" He turned on the lights and made a U-turn and drove back in the opposite

direction. "I'm making a detour over the mountains," he explained. "Otherwise we might run into our pursuer at the next traffic light."

"I wonder who that was?" Bob asked himself. "And why was he after us?"

"A strange evening," Jupiter summed up. "First a glowing ship disappearing before our eyes, and then a mysterious stranger following us. Fellas, it's about time we knew more about this case. We need to investigate, so we're as prepared as possible for tomorrow night!"

"Investigate what?" Pete asked.

"Bob will develop the photos."

"And what are you going to do until then?" Bob moaned.

"Pete pays a visit to Miss Snell," Jupiter said. "I want to know why she lied to us and if she's hiding anything."

Pete pulled a face. "Last time, she slammed the door in my face."

Jupiter smiled confidently. "Then you will have to make sure that she doesn't do that tomorrow."

"And what about you?" Pete asked.

"I'm gonna rent a boat and go out on the 'Hook'... to see who lives there and see if they can help us."

"Jupiter was right," muttered Pete. "She didn't slam the door in my face. She didn't even open it at all."

Furiously he pressed the bell button for the fourth time, but nothing moved in the small house. Pete looked around indecisively. He didn't want to leave things unfinished. Besides, he had only let Jupiter off at the boat rental ten minutes ago. The First Investigator was on his way to the small island in a small motorboat and would not return for at least an hour. Should Pete be standing outside this door the whole time?

His eyes fell on the lighthouse, which towered into the sky nearby. From up here, he had a fantastic view. Even before he had finished thinking about it, Pete flinched when he realized something—that they were complete idiots! If anyone, besides the mysterious jogger, had seen the ghost ship, then it wasn't the inhabitant of the 'Hook', but the lighthouse keeper! And hadn't Aunt Elenor said that Deborah Snell had an affair with him? Maybe she had been up in the lighthouse last night to watch the ghost ship from there.

Abruptly Pete turned around and went straight towards the lighthouse. The entrance was a white painted steel door. Instead of a door handle, there was only a knob that could not be turned. You could only get in with a key. A bell was nowhere to be seen. Disappointed, he turned away.

A woman with short, dark hair came down the road. Loaded with two shopping bags, she walked towards the lighthouse. The snake tattoo on her shoulder glowed in the sun.

Pete ran into her. With the shopping bags, she could not escape and there was no door to slam.

"Good afternoon, Miss Snell," cried Pete as kindly as possible. "May I help you with your shopping?"

The young woman looked up, recognized Pete and flinched. She looked around as if she were looking for a way to escape. But then she lowered her shoulders and stepped towards Pete.

"Hello," she greeted him sheepishly.

"I hope you have a little more time for me today," Pete began. "I would like to talk to you again about the night before last."

"The night before last?" she muttered silently. "All right."

With a movement of her head, she told him to come along. She put the shopping bags in front of the door, but instead of going in, she crouched on the small wall that lined the entrance. Pete sat down next to her.

"I lied to you yesterday," she admitted.

"I noticed that," replied the Second Investigator, looking attentively at Deborah Snell's face. She seemed rattled, looking around repeatedly as if she feared being overheard.

"I was scared, that's why I didn't tell the truth," she whispered.

"Scared? Of what?"

"I... I don't know... Of you... Of the police. I thought maybe you'd have me committed to a mental institution or something."

"But Miss Snell, we—" Pete began.

"I know that's nonsense. But when you guys showed up at my door yesterday, I didn't know what to do. So I denied everything. In hindsight, I'm very sorry. I behaved like a child."

"We shouldn't have approached you like that," Pete apologized.

"All right. I overreacted. But you have to believe one thing. Everything I told you and your friends is the truth! There really was a ghost ship! And something else." She looked around again and then bent over to him. "I saw it again," she whispered.

"Really?" Pete played surprised.

"Yes, the night before last! This story did not leave me alone, I had to go down to the beach again and have a look. And there it reappeared, just like the last time!"

"What have you done?"

"There's nobody else there. I ran to the road a second time and stopped a car. A man came along. He saw the ship too."

"So?"

"The ghost ship came ever closer. Finally, my nerves snapped, and I just ran away."

"And the man?"

"I don't know. But I know now that I'll never go to the beach at night again. I've hardly slept for the last week because of all the fear. I've had enough."

"My friend Jupiter claims that there is no reason to be afraid," Pete replied. "Because we are investigating this case."

"You're investigating?"

"Yes, we're detectives. Jupiter is convinced that there is a logical explanation for everything. He wants to solve the mystery of the ghost ship."

Deborah Snell turned pale. "He what? Solve the mystery?"

"Yes. Why are you so frightened?"

"It's a ghost ship! And ghosts are not to be trifled with!"

"Well," Pete said. "Well, that's what I said. But Jupiter—"

"You'll put yourself in great danger if you don't keep your hands off this!" she warned.

"I already know why I ran away. I can't bear to think what could happen to you if you get too close to the spirits!"

"What... what?" Pete stammered.

"But everybody knows that! If you mess with supernatural powers, you're dead!"

During the day, the small island with the miniature lighthouse could be seen from the coast. The difficult to estimate distance on the open sea played a trick on Jupiter. As he approached

the island, it seemed to him to be larger than it had appeared from the mainland. But then he noticed that he was not far away at all, and immediately it shrank again in his imagination.

The 'Hook' was in fact a little more than a large rock rising bizarrely out of the Pacific Ocean. It was shaped like a crescent. At the top of the island there was a white house and the small lighthouse. From the house, a wooden staircase wound down to a tiny beach and a jetty. There, a snow-white yacht swayed up and down in the light waves. The First Investigator squinted his eyes together. When he got close enough, he could see the name of the boat —*Rainbow*. It was the yacht with which they almost collided with last night.

"Aha," mumbled Jupiter. "So the yacht belongs to the islanders. All the better. I'll have an alibi in a minute." He steered the boat around the 'Hook'.

The back was much more rugged. Here, for thousands of years, the rough Pacific Ocean had been crashing against the rocks, forming a natural bay that had given the island its distinctive shape and finally its name. Like two huge arms, the rocky outcrops protruded into the sea. The bay was partly shielded by the rocks and when Jupiter wanted to get closer, he noticed that the entrance was blocked by a net above the water. Probably the inhabitants of the 'Hook' was tired of curious boat excursionists constantly exploring their property.

Jupiter steered the boat further around the island and returned to the front. Next to the *Rainbow*, there was still enough space to moor. The First Investigator switched off the engine and let himself drift the last few metres to the wooden jetty. Then he moored the boat and climbed out. He wanted to pay a visit to the islander, but he did not get far. When he had climbed the first few wooden steps, the front door opened and a bearded man in his late sixties came out.

"Hey, boy! This island is private property! Get out of here!"

"I'm sorry, sir, it was not my intention to trespass. Do you own the yacht down here?"

"Who else?" replied the old man sullenly.

Jupiter hesitated. Yesterday it had been a woman who had discovered them and helped them. "The *Rainbow* almost rammed our boat last night."

"Oh, so it was you!" cried the man furiously. "My nephew's girlfriend was on board and told me about it. And now? Are you going to complain or even press charges? That's even better!"

"No, no, quite the opposite. I want to thank your nephew's girlfriend for towing us back to the coast."

For a moment, the old man frowned as if he was considering whether to believe Jupiter or not. Finally, he waved him over. The First Investigator hurried up the stairs before the man could change his mind.

The old man was a bit shorter than Jupiter and had a weather-beaten face, his skin looked like cracked leather. At first glance, he seemed threatening, but then the countless wrinkles distorted into a smile. Jupiter seemed to have seen the man before.

"I am Jupiter Jones," he introduced himself and reached out his hand.

"Farnham," replied the man. Jupiter frowned. "Conrad Farnham?"

Mr Farnham seemed surprised. "Quite so."

"You looked so familiar right away. You used to work as a producer at one of the big movie studios, didn't you?"

"How do you know that?"

The First Investigator blushed. "I was on television once. But that was a long time ago." Jupiter had played a cheeky little chubby kid in a children's series. He had never met Conrad Farnham in person, but back then the name was known everywhere.

"I retired from the movie business years ago. Too stressful. Since then, I've been living here on the 'Hook'. The island is perfect. You have absolute peace and quiet, but still you can be on the mainland in ten minutes by yacht. But tell me, have we met before?"

"No, I don't think so." Jupiter was uncomfortable talking about his career as a child star. He quickly changed the subject: "By the way, I not only wanted to thank you, but also to apologize. It was very reckless of us to sail so far out in the fog and without lights. We not only put ourselves in danger, but also the *Rainbow*. I am truly sorry."

Mr Farnham's smile widened. "That's rare these days for anyone to bother to apologize, I mean. You're really lucky that Jimmy's girlfriend saw you in time and turned the wheel. Just be a little more careful in the future."

"I promise."

"What were you doing at sea so late anyway?" Farnham asked.

"Oh, we just tinkered around a bit," lied Jupiter. "I guess we lost our bearings and confused your lighthouse with Malibu Beach."

"Yes, that happens a lot."

"But there was something else," Jupiter began and looked down in feigned uncertainty. "We saw... something... on the water."

"What? A shark's fin?" Farnham asked amusedly.

"No. Something very big," Jupiter said. "It glowed in the dark. We were too far away to see it clearly, so we moved closer, but it fled from us."

"A fog bank probably. When one of the lighthouses shines on it, sometimes the fog really starts to lift."

Jupiter shook his head. "No, I think it was something else. And that's the third reason I'm here. I wanted to ask you if you've noticed anything strange the past few nights."

"Are you pulling my leg now, boy," Farnham asked and his friendly expression gave way to a mixture of scepticism and rising anger. "There are ships and fishing boats out there, nothing else. And most of them don't dare go out in this weather."

"Well, it could have been that you noticed something," replied Jupiter, disappointed.

Farnham laughed. "Perhaps you've seen the ghost ship of Duncan the Dark, said to be lurking out here on eerie foggy nights."

9. Duncan the Dark

Jupiter's ears were wide open. "Pardon?"

"Duncan the Dark," laughed Farnham. "Haven't you ever heard of that story? I thought it was a familiar story around here. Well, I'm the only one who knows it. You know, I've been doing a little pirate stuff for a while... A movie I co-produced several years ago gave me the idea. California has a fascinating buccaneer past."

"I know," replied Jupiter. "Just think of the Red Pirate William Evans."

"Ah, I see you know your way around."

"A little. But I never heard of a Duncan. What's his story?"

"Duncan lived in the early 19th century," Farnham said. "He was a real pirate and attacked the merchant ships that came to California from the east coast to support the Mexicans who were here at that time. Although soldiers were often on board at that time because of the many wars of independence, they had no chance against Duncan. He was much too clever and his ship, the *Stormrider*, was much too fast. They never got hold of him."

"But Duncan had a rival pirate named Hawk, also known as The Tyrant. For years, the two of them waged a small war for their territory, chasing each other's prey and fighting each other to the death."

"One day Duncan managed to rob a richly-loaded cargo ship and capture a huge treasure. But when he returned to his hideout, Hawk was waiting for him to destroy him for good. There was a cruel fight between Duncan's and Hawk's men in which many lost their lives. Duncan himself got his left arm cut off, but with his last strength he drove Hawk away. But Hawk had taken the treasure for himself, though."

"Did Duncan die?" Jupe asked.

"He hovered between life and death for weeks, but he survived his severe injury," Farnham continued. "And from then on, his only goal in life was revenge. He wanted revenge for the death of his men and the loss of his arm. He had to hunt down Hawk and get the treasure back. Duncan did everything he could to get Hawk. He raided his pirate's nest, but the treasure wasn't there any more—Hawk had hidden it. A wild chase began, until finally the decisive fight came."

Mr Farnham lowered his voice. "It was on a foggy night right here off the coast of Malibu, a fierce sea battle ensued. Duncan's ship was hit hard and began to sink. In an act of desperation, he steered the *Stormrider* straight for the Hawk's ship and rammed it. On the decks of both sinking ships, the pirates fought each other to the last man."

Jupiter listened in fascination. "And who won?"

"With Duncan having only one arm left, Hawk had the advantage. Hawk mortally wounded his mortal enemy in a sabre duel and managed to escape in a lifeboat. But not before hearing Duncan's last words. As he lay dying, Duncan swore revenge beyond his death. He would return as a ghost with his ship and hunt down and destroy Hawk, his descendants and all who got in his way until he got his treasure back."

Jupiter swallowed involuntarily. "And what happened to Hawk?"

"Irony of fate. He died a few weeks later from the smallpox the Spanish had brought with them. He took the secret of the treasure's hiding place with him to his death."

“What about Duncan’s promise?”

“Well, since that time, people have claimed to have seen *Stormrider* off the coast in eerie foggy nights. They say the ghost of Duncan the Dark is waiting to get its hands on a descendant of Hawk. We’ve been getting a lot of fog lately.”

“You’ve lived on the island for years. Have you ever seen the ghost ship?”

Conrad Farnham shook his head. “Not yet. But who knows—maybe you met him yesterday.”

Jupiter was uneasy. He didn’t know what to answer. Fortunately, Farnham saved him with a wink. “I didn’t mean to scare you, boy.”

“What would you do if you saw the ship?”

“Well, I’d probably run away right now. The dark one was not to be trifled with.” Then he laughed. “But after all, it’s all just a legend, isn’t it?”

A little disturbed, but at least as tense, Jupiter returned to the mainland. Pete was already waiting for him at the agreed meeting point near the beach promenade.

“So?” they both asked at the same time.

“You first,” demanded Jupiter.

Pete told him about his conversation with Deborah Snell. “She sounded quite reasonable. But when I told her we were investigating the case, she turned very pale and warned me. She told me to stay away from ghosts and who knows what could happen to us. After that she disappeared pretty quickly into the lighthouse.”

Pete lowered his voice. “To be honest, it scared me a little. She’s right. Ghost ships are not to be trifled with. You’ve both experienced that first-hand. You almost capsized because of that ship. If the yacht had rammed you, you’d be finished.”

Then Pete asked: “How did you go?”

Jupiter thought about how he could calm his friend. Mr Farnham’s pirate story would not help.

“Ahem,” Jupiter cleared his throat. “You’ll find out when we get back to Rocky Beach. Bob’s probably waiting for us at Headquarters.”

Bob Andrews was hanging the last prints on the line to dry when he heard Jupiter and Pete storming into Headquarters. With a trained eye, he checked whether the unexposed photo paper was well stored, then he stepped out of the lab.

“There you are! So? What did you find out?” Bob asked.

“That’s what I’ve been trying to squeeze out of Jupe all along,” Pete said. “But he’s silent as the grave because he insisted on waiting for you.”

“I need Bob’s support,” Jupiter defended himself. “Because what I have to tell you won’t thrill you, Pete. I know you.”

“Oh, oh,” mumbled the Second Investigator. “I suspect evil.”

They sat down and Jupiter began to tell about his visit to the ‘Hook’. When he came to the pirate story, Pete and Bob became more and more pale. He had expected this from Pete, but Bob’s reaction surprised him.

“We’re in the middle of a mess again,” Pete moaned when Jupiter had finished. “One-armed pirates and ghost ships. Just wonderful!”

“And a lost treasure,” Jupiter added. “Doesn’t that tempt you at all?”

“Not if you lose an arm or two in the hunt for it,” Pete replied gloomily.

“Old pessimist,” Jupiter moaned. “What about you, Bob?”

"I'm... I'm not quite sure. Your story scared me a little."

"The scary tale of the evil pirate Duncan the Dark?" Jupiter laughed mockingly. "Please, Bob! There are dozens of legends like that. I am not aware of any such dark prophecies ever having come true."

"Then maybe this is the first," Bob said.

"What makes you think so?" Pete asked anxiously.

"The photographs. I developed them and enlarged the interesting parts. Wait, I'll get them, then you'll know what I mean." Bob went to the lab and came back with the prints, now dry.

Pete looked at them with interest. He had never seen the ghost ship up close. Although they were only photos, they looked so ghostly that a shiver ran down his spine. He was glad he hadn't been in the boat with Juve and Bob.

"Here," Bob said, and presented them with a blow-up of a photo. "Here, the skeleton is clearly visible. You see it?"

"What?" Pete asked.

"The left arm!" Bob exclaimed.

"I don't see a left arm," Pete replied.

"Exactly. Because there isn't one. It's missing."

The Second Investigator held the photo closer to his nose. At first sight, it had looked as if the left arm was in the shadow. But now he saw it too—the shoulder ended in emptiness. The arm was no longer there. For the second time, a shiver gripped him.

"That wasn't all," Bob announced and presented another photo. It showed the starboard side of the ship with a slightly faded name in squiggly letters.

Now even Jupiter gasped in horror. "Unbelievable! It's the *Stormrider*!"

10. The Ghost Ship Tracking Device

“So what now? We are dealing with the ghost of a vengeful-thirsty pirate who—what did Mr Farnham say?—wants to destroy all those who get in his way,” Pete summed up. “I’d say we even got in his way quite a bit last night. I have little desire to tangle with him again.”

“You? You weren’t even there,” said Jupiter. “Besides, the ship fled from us. I hardly think it will attack next time. How could it?”

“With cannons!” cried Pete. “When a cannonball like that hits your boat, you’re gone!”

“It’s just a ghost cannonball, Pete,” Jupiter teased him. “It’s only made of spherical astral substance and can’t harm you.”

Jupiter waved him off. “Forget it. All I’m saying is that we are definitely not dealing with a ghost, but with someone who has seen too many pirate movies. Now all we have to do is to find out who that is and what purpose he’s doing all this show for.”

“Besides, there is a treasure to be found,” added Bob, who had quickly overcome his fear.

“Maybe that’s the point,” Pete doubted. “It could be that someone is trying to make us think that there is a treasure when in reality there isn’t.”

Bob shook his head. “If Jupe hadn’t gone to the ‘Hook’ today, we would never have known about the treasure. Besides, you and Kelly just happened to get into this whole thing by accident.”

“Right, Bob,” Jupe agreed. “Someone was meant to see that ghost ship, but it sure wasn’t us.”

“Then what?” Pete said.

“So far, we only know two people who have seen the *Stormrider* besides us—Mr Quinn and Deborah Snell,” Jupiter said.

“And with Mr Quinn it was as much of a coincidence as it was with us,” Bob said. “That leaves Miss Snell.”

“Who is already so panicked that she no longer dares to go to the beach,” Jupiter pursued the thought further, eagerly pinching his lower lip. “Maybe someone wants to keep her away from the beach. Unfortunately, he hadn’t counted on us. We won’t let ourselves be driven away so easily. Tonight we must find out where the ghost ship is going.”

“You really want to go back on the trail? But what do we do if it vanishes into thin air again?”

“In that case, I’ve already thought of something,” Jupiter said. “But I’ll have to work on it in the workshop for a while. I suggest we meet back here tonight and go to Malibu together.”

“Work on it?” Pete asked. “What are you up to, Jupe?”

The First Investigator smiled mysteriously. “Let yourself be surprised!”

It was shortly after sunset when The Three Investigators arrived at the beach. The air was clear, and today the fog was not so bad. Mr Quinn was already there, looking out over the Pacific Ocean as he walked restlessly up and down. He seemed very relieved when he spotted the three friends coming down the wooden stairs.

"I was afraid you wouldn't come. I got off work early today."

"Sorry it took so long, Mr Quinn," Pete replied. "Jupiter had to do work on something."

"Work on something?" Mr Quinn asked.

"A device to capture ghost ships," Bob explained. "We don't know exactly what it is either. Jupiter is a terrible mystery-monger, you know." Grinning, he turned to the First Investigator. "But maybe now you're finally ready to enlighten us."

"With pleasure," Jupiter smiled, unbuckled his backpack and opened it. "Tadaaa!"

Triumphantly, he pulled out a dangerous-looking metal thing. It looked like a mixture of a jack, a hole punch and a pair of poultry shears. He proudly presented it to his curious audience.

Pete was the first one who dared to say something. "Chic, Jupe, very chic... What on earth is that? Modern art?"

"A crossbow. Or a harpoon, for that matter," Jupiter said.

"A what? Are you trying to kill someone?"

Jupiter shook his head, smiling. "Not at all, Pete," he said and immediately fell into his headmasterly tone, which he always displayed whenever he wanted to shine with his knowledge. "This device is not intended to hurt anyone, but was developed for the sole purpose of marking a disappearing ship, so that we could determine its position even if it should disappear into thin air again."

The First Investigator looked into the bewildered faces of his friends and continued: "The instrument is tensioned by this spring construction." He demonstrated it and now it actually looked like a crossbow. "Now I can fire this little metal bolt." He placed an elongated, pointed object in the rail provided. "At the salvage yard, I found a spring that had enough tension to shoot the bolt a good seventy metres. At fifty metres, it has enough force to drill into a piece of wood."

Without further explanation, he turned around, aimed at the stairs and pulled the trigger. Buzzing, the bolt shot through the air, hit the railing and tremblingly got stuck there.

"That's life-threatening!" gasped Pete.

"Jupe! When did you learn to shoot so well?" cried Bob astonished.

"I am full of undiscovered talents," replied the First Investigator confidently. "In fact, the main part of the job is to balance the device as precisely as possible to ensure a purposeful trajectory."

"I don't quite understand," confessed Mr Quinn. "With this thing you hope to stop the ghost ship?"

"Not stop. I want to mark it," Jupiter explained. "The bolt is hollow. You can unscrew it. Inside is a tracking device." He pulled another device out of his backpack and turned it on. A steady beeping sound was heard. "This will allow me to determine the distance to the transmitter. The quieter the beeping, the further away the transmitter is."

Bob and Pete nodded knowingly. They knew the device because it had helped them several times in their detective career. Jupiter demonstrated it and walked towards the stairs with the receiver. The closer they came, the louder the sound became. He pulled the bolt with the hidden transmitter out of the wooden railing and stowed the equipment back in his backpack.

"When we get close enough to the ghost ship, I'll mark it with the transmitter," Jupiter continued. "That way we can track it, even if it disappears again... if it even shows up today."

Jupiter glanced at the ocean, over which there was only a faint haze—no comparison to the wafts of mist of the last nights. Some ships were on their way. They all took advantage of

the good weather for an evening excursion.

While Bob and Pete paid tribute to him, Mr Quinn remained sceptical. "But if it does break up! If it just disappears! Then a tracking device is useless."

"Mr Quinn, no ship just disappears," Jupiter said. "I don't know how it works yet, but I guarantee it's a trick and not an act of revenge by Duncan the Dark."

All of a sudden, Quinn turned pale "What did you just say?"

"Duncan the Dark," Jupiter replied. "Oh, yeah, we didn't tell you about that. We've come on the trail of a legend that explains, at least mythologically, the appearance of the ghost ship." The First Investigator told his client what they'd found out that afternoon.

Quinn kept nodding as if he knew this story.

"Do you know anything more about it?" Jupiter asked.

"I'm afraid... yes," Mr Quinn said.

Jupiter frowned. "You know about Duncan and Hawk? About the *Stormrider* and the treasure?"

Quinn nodded again.

"Why didn't you tell us about this?" Jupiter exclaimed.

"I didn't think it was important," Quinn evaded, stepping restlessly from one foot to the other.

"Mr Quinn, you are our client," Jupiter burst out. "You should tell us every little thing, even if it may seem trivial at first glance. So what else do you know about this pirate story?"

"That Duncan was an old drunk who robbed every ship that got in his way. He was a scoundrel who didn't care a hoot who his victims were as long as he got money and booze."

The Three Investigators looked at each other in surprise. Never before had they seen the otherwise reserved Quinn so enthusiastically.

"So?" Bob asked.

"Hawk was a pirate too, but he wasn't nearly as tough as Duncan," Quinn continued. "He was also the first to set sail off the coast of California. The Dark One came later and tried to take his territory."

"Well, I guess that's the other side of the story Mr Farnham told me," Jupiter added. "He portrayed Hawk as the villain. How it really happened, we will probably never know. How do you know this legend so well?"

"My grandfather told me many times," Quinn revealed.

"I thought you said your grandfather was actually friends with Conrad Farnham."

Quinn laughed. "Friend? I certainly didn't say that. They knew each other. Farnham came to my grandfather at least once a week for a while and harassed him. I don't know what it was about, but they argued constantly until my grandfather's collar finally burst and he threatened to call the police if Farnham entered his property one more time. After that, there was peace."

"Interesting," Jupiter said thoughtfully.

"As a child, I often went to my grandfather's house and listened to his stories," Quinn continued. "He went to sea himself, you know. And for every story, he had a matching ship in a bottle that he showed me."

"The collection of ships in bottles," Bob thought. "We've been sorting through your grandfather's items. The ships are now in the collector's corner."

Quinn nodded. It seemed as if he wanted to continue, but he didn't dare. Finally he stammered: "There is something else... It's probably completely meaningless, but... but you said it could still be important, Jupiter."

"Which is?" asked the First Investigator curiously.

“Hawk the Tyrant, was... he was one of my ancestors. He was my great-great-grandfather.”

11. News from Aunt Elenor

“Excuse me?” Jupiter asked, amazed.

“This was something my grandfather was particularly proud of. That one of his forefathers was a real pirate. My mother never cared, so he passed all his pirate stories on to me. It was always very important to him that I know and preserve the family history.” He smiled sheepishly.

His grandfather’s pride didn’t seem to rub off on him. He was obviously uncomfortable with his background.

“And you only say that now?” asked Jupiter stunned.

“But that’s not important,” Quinn claimed.

“Not important? Do you think it’s a coincidence that you, a direct descendant of Hawk the Tyrant, are the very one who sees the ghost ship of his arch-enemy over a hundred and fifty years later?”

“But that’s not proven,” claimed Mr Quinn.

“Yes, it is.” Bob brought out the enlarged photos. “The ghost ship is the *Stormrider*.”

“The *Stormrider*?” Quinn gasped, terrified. “Duncan’s ship! I’d hoped it was a coincidence... You know, when I was a kid, I was afraid of those scary stories. I used to imagine what would happen if Duncan’s ghost came to visit me one day. Then two days ago, when I saw that ship, my back went cold. I didn’t tell you about Hawk because I thought you’d think I was crazy.” He laughed nervously. “Who believes in ghost ships?”

“Not us,” Jupiter said convincingly. “That is why we want to solve this case as quickly as possible. Please, Mr Quinn, tell us everything you can remember. Did your grandfather mention anything else? Or maybe someone in your family took the trouble to write down all these stories? Are there old records? Do you know anything about Duncan’s family? Maybe it’s one of his descendants that’s involved.”

Quinn shook his head thoughtfully. “Nothing of the sort. There’s only this chest.”

“A treasure chest?” Pete asked excitedly.

“No, no. Just old family junk from my grandfather. Actually, he was a superstitious man. When he was seriously ill, he told me that he didn’t care what happened to his property after he died—as long as I keep the chest and pass it on to my children and grandchildren.”

“So? What’s in the chest? I hope you’ve opened it already.”

“That wasn’t necessary. I remember it from before. There’s nothing in there but old papers, birth certificates, old letters, ancient charts and diaries—just family property.”

“Have you ever looked closer at these things before?” Bob wanted to know.

Quinn shook his head. “Honestly, no.”

“May we perhaps have a look into the chest?” Jupiter asked. “Old documents, ancient maps—that sounds promising.”

“Fine,” Quinn replied uncertainly. “If you think it will help you get ahead.”

“I can’t say yet,” Jupiter said. “But it won’t hurt to gather information.”

“When do you want to look at those stuff?”

Jupiter looked out to the sea. There was still no fog. And it didn’t look like there’d be any tonight either.

"How about now?" Jupiter decided. "I don't think we're gonna see that ghost ship tonight. The view is far too clear."

"But if it appears, we should be able to see it well," Pete objected.

"Without the fog, it won't even appear," Jupiter said. "Look, there are far too many ships out there. I think our ghostly captain of the *Stormrider* won't dare to appear in front of so many witnesses."

"How come?" Pete asked.

"Because I've come to believe that this whole spell is being cast solely for you, Mr Quinn," Jupiter surmised.

All of a sudden, Quinn turned pale "For me?"

"And perhaps for Deborah Snell. However, since she doesn't go jogging at night because of fear and there are too many ships out there, the ghost ship will not show up... at least not tonight."

"Too bad," mumbled Pete. "Then you won't be able to try out your tracking crossbow. But it's okay with me. I wasn't eager to run into the *Stormrider* again anyway."

"Fine, let's go to my place," Quinn decided. "I'll just bring the boat back and get my car."

He gave them his address, got into the small boat and steered away while The Three Investigators went up the beach to the stairs.

"Too bad that today of all days the weather is good," growled Jupiter.

"Maybe we'll find something in great-great-grandfather Quinn's treasure chest," Bob tried to comfort him.

They reached the street and were about to get into Pete's car when a bell-like voice called out to them: "Yay! Children! Whoo-hoo!"

The Second Investigator turned and rolled his eyes. "Oh my goodness! It's Aunt Elenor. That's all we need. Let's pretend we didn't see her and just go away."

"Too late," said Jupiter, pointing to a small, yapping ball that bounced towards her.

"Cupcake Honey! Stay right here. Cupcakes," Elenor Madigan, wearing a bright pink costume today, ran after the dog until she reached The Three Investigators.

"Jupiter, Pete and Rob! It's so nice of you to come and see me," she beamed as Muffins tugged at Bob's trousers leg.

Pete opened his eyes in horror. "Uh... we actually wanted to..."

"Too bad I can't make it tonight of all nights. Because once a week, I meet the ladies from the neighbourhood to play rummy. Before that, I wanted to go for a little spin with Muffins. Isn't that right, my little baby bear?" She bent down and lifted the ball up before it tore Bob's pants off.

At once the 'yipp-yipp' began anew.

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Pete replied quickly. "We... we were just in the area and we thought..."

"That you come and visit me again. How charming of you!" Aunt Elenor said. "But next time call first! Just don't call between two and four in the afternoon, when Muffins is taking his nap."

"We will." The Three Investigators wrung a smile from each other.

"Well, I'd better get going, or I'll be late for my rummy night. Let Muffins make his poop. And he only does that over there in that little grove. He's very particular, isn't he, my dear?"

"No problem," Bob said quickly. "Have a nice evening!"

"Goodbye," Elenor Madigan whispered and went on.

Pete breathed again. "That was luck! Imagine what would have happened if she hadn't had her rummy night tonight!"

"Wait! I forgot about something," Miss Madigan cried and turned back.

"Don't tell me she was wrong about the day of the week!" whispered Pete.

"You were enquiring about Deborah Snell, weren't you?" Aunt Elenor said. "I've been paying closer attention to her these past few days. It's scandalous!"

"What is it, Miss Madigan?" Jupiter asked with interest.

"You won't believe what I've been seeing!" She bent conspiratorially and whispered, "She is indeed meeting secretly with her future uncle-in-law, this Mr Farnham, while her boyfriend sleeps during the day."

"Mr Farnham?" Jupiter cried in surprise. "You mean Conrad Farnham, who lives out there on the 'Hook'?"

"Yes, exactly. Do you know him?"

"Not really. You are saying that he's her... uh... uncle-in-law?" Jupiter remarked, surprised.

"Her future uncle-in-law," she insisted. "His nephew who works at the lighthouse and this Miss Snell are engaged in a wild marriage."

"So the lighthouse keeper is Conrad Farnham's nephew?" Jupiter asked.

"Yes. Jimmy Farnham."

"Interesting," Jupiter remarked. "Is that all you know about him?"

"Sorry."

"And what about his uncle, Conrad Farnham?"

"Oh, that movie guy," she said, slightly snide. "People say strange things about him. He seems a bit... well, you know..." Again she leaned forward. "Not being quite right in the head. Spins around with his pirate stories. But who's surprised if he lives for years alone and deserted on his puny island. They used to say he wanted to build a pirate museum there, but it never came off."

She sighed heavily. "Well, movie people. By the way, did you know that I'm the new neighbour of a TV star?" She clapped her hands in delight, and Muffins continued to bark. "Two houses down, Dr Brown has moved in. Isn't it exciting?"

"Dr Brown?" Bob repeated without understanding.

"Well, of course, his name isn't really Dr Brown. But he plays him in this hospital show I love to watch. Sometimes I run into him when he goes to the movie studio. A very nice person."

"Really." Jupiter cleared his throat. "Well, we won't keep you any longer, Miss Madigan. Your rummy ladies are waiting."

"Oh yes, I almost forgot again," she laughed and lowered Muffins again. "Cupcake-boy, sweetie, don't touch Rob's pants."

"Bob," Bob corrected her, knowing it would be of no use.

"Well, goodbye, children!" She scurried off and The Three Investigators hurried away before Aunt Elenor changed her mind.

"An interesting interlude," Jupiter summed up on the way to see Mr Quinn. "So our mysterious jogger is involved with the nephew of Conrad Farnham. She sees a ghost ship and a few days later her future uncle-in-law tells me the whole pirate story about Duncan the Dark and Hawk the Tyrant. And her boyfriend, of all people, is a lighthouse keeper, and night after night he has an excellent view of the Pacific Ocean and everything that goes on there."

"Then it was she who towed us last night!" Bob remembered. "Deborah Snell almost ran into us."

“She told me she was home all evening last night,” Pete interjected. “It’s getting more and more suspicious.”

“I think so, too. We should deal with these most strange connections between her and the two Farnhams first thing tomorrow. “But for now, I am curious to see Mr Quinn’s mysterious family heirlooms.”

12. The Diary of the Tyrant

In the attic, it smelled musty. The heat of the day had built up under the roof and had not yet dissipated. Some dusty furniture stood around. Cardboard boxes, between which spiders had built their webs, piled up in the corners. There was no light up here, only the glow of three flashlights illuminated the room.

“I’ve put the chest here until I find time to deal with its contents,” explained Mr Quinn, who had led The Three Investigators up to the attic of his little house. “There it is.”

The plain chest was made of old, weathered wood. The brass fittings had become dull in the course of time and otherwise it looked quite unimpressive. At least from the outside, it was no classic treasure chest.

“Take a good look at everything. Can I leave you alone?”

“Of course, Mr Quinn,” Jupiter replied as the owner climbed down the narrow, shaky ladder.

“Let’s go, fellas!” Curious, the First Investigator knelt in front of the chest and opened the creaking lid.

The smell of old paper struck them. The light of the flashlights fell on a disorderly pile of books, letters and other written material.

“You want us to work through all this?” moaned Pete. “It’ll take us weeks. Do you really think we can find a clue to the treasure? Someone must have found it before us.”

Bob nodded. “Pete is right. After all, the chest has been in the family for five generations. Mr Quinn has never been particularly interested in it, but we’re certainly not the first to take a closer look.”

“I’m not saying we’ll find a treasure map,” Jupiter said. “But it can’t hurt to get a better picture of Hawk the Tyrant and his descendants. After all, it seems to be all about that old family history.”

Jupiter reached into the chest, pulled out a stack of letters at random and leafed through them.

Now Bob and Pete also got to work. Bob unfolded an old nautical chart while Pete opened a logbook, the yellowed pages of which were so illegibly written that he could hardly decipher a word.

Soon countless documents were scattered on the floor. Bob had asked Mr Quinn for some candles to conserve the batteries in their flashlights. In the flickering light, The Three Investigators delved into the documents. Dozens of birth and marriage certificates, family trees, and journeymen’s or master craftsmen’s letters of the last generations piled up, but all this information was of no value to them. There seemed to be nothing at all in the chest from the pirate Hawk himself.

Then Jupiter pulled out a tattered, leather-bound book. The pages were stiff and crackled when he opened it. It had been written on with pen and black ink about halfway through—the remaining pages were blank.

It was a diary, as the First Investigator discovered with a quick glance. He was trying to decipher the contents. “Ha!” he shouted so loudly that his friends jumped.

“What’s wrong?” Pete asked immediately. “Have you found a treasure map?”

“No. But if I’m not mistaken, this is the journal of Hawk the Tyrant himself. Look at the dates on the entries. They begin in 1855 and end with his death in 1858. Unfortunately the writing is so ornate that I can hardly read it. In the nineteenth century, people wrote really strangely. Some passages are already completely faded. But still I would say: ‘This book is a smash hit, fellas!’”

“Do you want to read the whole thing?” Pete asked incredulously.

“It’s not that much. Once you get used to the writing, I’m sure it’ll be quick. Let’s see if we can find some more.”

They also searched the rest of the chest, but didn’t find anything else important. Then they put all the papers back neatly, closed the lid and climbed down from the attic. Mr Quinn allowed them to take the book with them to examine it more closely. The Three Investigators promised to contact him the next day if they found out anything.

“I have a task for you,” Jupiter announced on the way home. “You will try to find out more about Conrad Farnham tomorrow. I would also like to learn something about his nephew and his inscrutable girlfriend, but the chances are not good for us. Farnham, however, was once a well-known movie producer. Maybe your father knows something about him, Pete.”

Pete’s father works in the movies. He was an expert on special effects at a large movie studio.

“And I’m gonna look around the library and the newspaper archives,” Bob promised.

The First Investigator nodded. “If you ask me, the Farnham-Snell-Farnham trio is hiding something. Meanwhile, I’ll take a look at Hawk’s diary and try to decipher it. I hope I could extract a few secrets from him. I’m sure we’re getting close to unravelling the mystery of the ghost ship.”

Jupiter could not sleep that night. He had planned to open the book the next day after school, but as he lay in bed at a late hour, he couldn’t resist. He turned on the light, took the diary of Captain Hawk and opened the first pages. Unfortunately, Pete’s doubts had been justified. It wasn’t easy to decipher the old writing. The meaning of some hooks and curlicues could only be deduced from the context.

After twenty minutes, when he hadn’t even finished a page, Jupiter decided to proceed more systematically. He got himself something to write and created an alphabet of Hawk’s handwriting, which he always used when some letters seemed to make no sense at all. In addition, there was the old-fashioned way of expression, the countless different spellings and the inkblots or faded areas that made some passages simply unreadable.

He laboriously fought his way sentence by sentence. But the fact of having the more than one hundred and fifty-year-old transcript of a dreaded pirate in front of his nose captivated him. The hours passed without Jupiter noticing. Little by little he got used to the writing and the traditional wordings and his gaze glided faster and faster over the lines. He was fascinated. Hawk the Tyrant, of whom he had hardly been able to form a picture before, gradually changed from a legendary figure to a real human being.

It was the last few pages of the diary that finally made Jupiter wide awake. When he had read everything after hours, sleep was no longer an option. The First Investigator was much too excited. Desperately, he took a look at his alarm clock. In three hours, it would ring and then the school would be waiting for Jupiter. But the information he had got from the diary made up for everything...

He can’t wait to tell Bob and Pete tomorrow!

The door was ripped open and the two detectives rumbled so violently into Headquarters that the glasses in the small shelf above the sink were shaking menacingly.

"Hey! Take it easy! You want to take the whole trailer apart?" Jupiter had made himself comfortable in the armchair. The diary was on the desk in front of him. He had read it again while waiting for Pete and Bob.

"You won't believe what we found out!" Pete blurted out. "It's really incredible, Jupe. This Mr Farnham has told you only half the story, if anything."

"If anything!" Bob exclaimed. "In any case, in his tale of the pirate Duncan the Dark, he's kept the most important thing from you."

"I would be grateful if you would tell me everything in order," Jupiter said and yawned.

"Don't act bored," Pete complained. "I'm sure you'll be delighted with the news, too."

"I'm yawning because I barely slept last night," the First Investigator admitted. "And as for your news, I hate to disappoint you, but I think I already know it."

Bob frowned. "Impossible."

"Can I guess?" Jupe continued. "You've discovered that one of Duncan and his pirates' hiding places happens to be the island now inhabited by Conrad Farnham."

Pete let his shoulders sink in disappointment. "How did you know that?"

Jupiter patted the diary. "It's all in here... and much more. Hawk mentioned Duncan's hideout many times, which, by the way, was brilliant. Although the island is quite close to the coast, it is practically impregnable. The steep rocks on one side and the hidden bay on the other side make the 'Hook' a natural fortress. Since you can't see the whole bay from any place, you never knew how many pirates were hiding there. So no one dared to attack the island."

"Fine," Bob said. "But you don't know this. It's no coincidence that Conrad Farnham lives there now."

"No?"

"No. We went to the library first, but didn't find out much about him there," Bob said. "Then we went to my father's office, looked in the archives of the *Los Angeles Times* and found some articles about Farnham. He was a movie producer."

"We already know that."

"His last movie was *Pirate Island*, for which he also wrote the screenplay," Bob continued. "When the shooting was finished, he announced that he wanted to retire from the movie business. In an interview, he explained that Hollywood cost him too much energy and that he now wanted to devote himself to other things. The research for his pirate movie fascinated him so much that he wanted to concentrate more on these topics. Since he had made enough money through movie-making over the years, he could afford to buy the 'Hook' and build a house on it. In fact, he wanted to build a pirate museum there, as Aunt Elenor had said, but nothing ever came of it."

"After these plans were buried, it became quite quiet around him," Pete took over. "Every couple of years, there was an article about this former top producer. But they're not particularly interesting. So we finally went to my father and asked him. He doesn't know Farnham personally but he has heard a lot about him. Farnham is said to have developed into a real pirate fanatic and have built up a huge library on this topic. He even admitted at one point that he had bought the 'Hook' mainly because he thought he would find a lost treasure of Duncan the Dark there."

"But of course there was none," Jupiter suspected.

“Right,” Bob replied. “Although the island was avoided after Duncan’s death, it was said to be haunted by his spirit. That’s what he finally announced as he was dying. But in time, the story was forgotten. Still, it was rare for anyone to be on the ‘Hook’. Why should there be? There’s nothing there.”

The Second Investigator nodded. “A few decades ago, the little lighthouse was built and that was it... until finally Farnham came along.”

“What do you say to that, Jupe?” Bob asked.

The First Investigator pinched his lower lip. “It all fits,” he murmured. “Hawk, Duncan, Farnham, Mr Quinn, Deborah Snell, the ghost ship and the treasure. Yeah, that’ll work. It’s got to be.”

“Would you please let us in on your deductions?” Pete asked. “Or are your thought processes too complicated for us?”

Jupiter explained: “If Conrad Farnham has developed into such a pirate specialist and is keen on old pirate treasures, then he surely knows about the treasure that Hawk snatched back then. And he’s been searching for it for years.”

“What makes you think of that?” Pete asked.

“Remember what Mr Quinn told us about his grandfather and Mr Farnham? He said that Farnham came to his house regularly for a while and that the two of them had a fight. What do you think that was all about?”

Pete shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know. How could we possibly know?”

“For the treasure, of course!” Jupe exclaimed.

“You mean Mr Quinn’s grandfather knew where the treasure was hidden?” Pete wondered.

“Perhaps he didn’t know it directly, but Farnham suspected a clue to its hiding place in the records of Hawk the Tyrant, which have been in the Quinn family for generations,” Jupe said. “He probably wanted to get hold of these records under the guise of historical research, but Quinn’s grandfather wouldn’t let him... Maybe he knew what Farnham was really about, maybe he was just stubborn. In any case, it’s clear that Farnham never got his hands on this book.” Jupiter waved the diary.

“And what does the ghost ship have to do with it? And Deborah Snell?”

“Quinn said that his grandfather was a superstitious man. Conrad Farnham probably knew this too. So he saw his only chance to get old Quinn to reveal the chest through the legend of the ghost ship.”

“You mean the ghost ship is not real?” Pete remarked. “Farnham built it to frighten Mr Quinn’s grandfather?”

“Him or his grandson,” Jupe said.

“A bit of a hassle, don’t you think?” Bob doubted it.

“Well, yes,” Jupiter admitted.

“What about Deborah Snell?” Pete wanted to know. “How does she fit into the whole story?”

“She is the girlfriend of Conrad Farnham’s nephew, the lighthouse keeper,” Jupiter said. “She was the decoy. Someone had to alert Mr Quinn to the ghost ship. Quinn gets home from work about the same time every night along the coast road. So her job was to jump in front of his car in the middle of the night and babble something about a ghost ship so he’d come along and see it with his own eyes.”

“Wait a minute! What about Pete and Kelly?” Bob asked. “If you’re right about your theory, our jogger should not have stopped them.”

The First Investigator pulled a face. “Some kind of test phase, perhaps? Or an accident?”

“Your deductive reasoning skills are admirable, but the story is very shaky on three points,” Bob insisted. “First, I hardly think anyone would recreate an old pirate ship just to get a diary. Second, Farnham and Deborah must be pretty stupid to accidentally stop the wrong people on the road. Thirdly, it would still not be clear how this giant ship can move without sails and then simply disappear into thin air. You saw it yourself. It couldn’t have been a trick!”

Jupiter sighed. Bob was not entirely wrong. But of course, he did not like to admit that. “All right,” he replied. “Let’s test our theory. If the *Stormrider* really does belong to Farnham, then it is guaranteed to be in the hidden bay of his island. So let’s all pay a visit to the ‘Hook’ together.

“Farnham will spot us immediately and chase us away,” Pete warned.

“He doesn’t have to see us,” Jupe explained. “If we go there tonight, we’ll have darkness on our side.”

“And... and what if we run into the ghost ship?” Pete asked.

“All the better. Then maybe we’ll discover its secret too.”

Pete sighed and let himself fall back in his chair. “My goodness! My head is already buzzing with information. I can’t process this so fast.”

“You should be. Because the best is yet to come,” Jupiter promised and grinned broadly. “After all, I haven’t told you what I found out yet.”

“And what’s that?” Bob asked.

“The diary was very revealing. I spent most of the night reading it.”

“Hence the fatigue. So? What does it say that’s so exciting?” Pete wanted to know.

“A lot,” Jupiter replied evasively. “Hawk was a villain, just like Duncan. When you read about the carnage they sometimes committed at sea, it makes you feel very different. Barbaric! Despite everything, Hawk was a remarkable man. For instance, he had a sort of trophy from every ship he ever overpowered.”

“The captain’s scalp?” Bob asked amused.

“No. He built the ships as models. Ships in bottles. Because Hawk loved ships, and he was sorry for any harm he had to do.”

“Sure. That’s why he became a pirate,” joked Pete. “Hey, these must be the ships in bottles we found in Quinn’s grandfather’s estate. We should tell your Aunt Mathilda. If she finds out they’re that old, the price will triple.”

“Did you find out anything else, or was that all?” Bob asked.

“No. It gets better.” His grin widened.

Bob rolled his eyes. “Come on, Jupe!”

The First Investigator enjoyed his superiority. Slowly he leaned back, laboriously crossed his legs, stroked the diary lovingly and finally said: “I know where the treasure is.”

13. Duncan's Ghost Attacks!

"What?" Pete suddenly sat upright in his chair. "And you're only saying this now? Are you crazy? Where? Where is it?"

"Fine," Jupiter gave in. "I don't really know... But I have some concrete clues."

"Sheesh! Come on, speak up!" Bob demanded.

"Okay, I'll tell you the whole story," Jupiter said. "Hawk had learned that Duncan had boarded a ship that was to support the Mexicans here in California. But apparently not only food and luxury goods were on board, but also a very valuable cargo that Duncan was keen on. The fight against the ship's crew was very bloody and also cost Duncan some victims, so it must have been worth it."

"Probably boxes of gold," Pete said with gleaming eyes.

"What it was exactly, unfortunately, is not mentioned anywhere," Jupiter continued. "But the treasure must have been quite large, that's for sure. Then there was the fight between Hawk and Duncan, where Hawk took the treasure, we already know the story. And now things are getting interesting."

The First Investigator opened the diary, leafed through it and read: "'Duncan has always been my mortal enemy, but I fear now he's becoming really dangerous. I took from him the most precious thing he had captured in all those years. But he will never get the treasure back, because I have hidden it in a place where he will never look for it. Right under his butt... on board the *Stormrider*.'"

"On the ship of his arch-enemy?" cried Bob incredulously. "Let me see!" He took the book out of his hand. "You can hardly read this. It's full of stains."

"I know this page is pretty ruined. And of all things, the ink is smudged at the crucial point. But the most important thing is still to be read." Jupiter tapped on the smudged page. "It says here—'... right under his butt... on board the *Stormrider*.'"

"Incredible," Pete said. "How did he do that? I don't imagine it would be so easy to get onto the ship of your worst enemy, steal the treasure and then hide it back there. And why at all? What was the point? Then he couldn't do anything with the treasure!"

"These are indeed two mysteries that still have to be solved," Jupiter admitted.

"But then the treasure is lost," cried Bob. "The *Stormrider* fell in the decisive battle! So now the treasure is somewhere at the bottom of the sea... for almost two hundred years now. It would be almost impossible to find the spot where the two ships sank today."

"Not impossible at all," claimed Jupiter. "Hawk left a treasure map behind."

"A treasure map?" Echo Bob. "How is this supposed to work? He barely escaped with his own life in that fight. If the story's true, he could paddle a lifeboat ashore. I don't think he could have pinpointed his position under those circumstances."

"I guess so. It must have been a very prominent spot, because Hawk claims it's a piece of cake to recover the treasure once you find the map. He hid it when he got infected with smallpox and knew that he would die soon. He didn't want the map to fall into the hands of his enemies."

"The map is hidden. That too," moaned Pete. "First he put the treasure on his arch-enemy's ship, then he hid the map."

“For his family—he had a son and a daughter—supposedly it should be no problem to find the map. At least that’s what he says in his diary.”

“They still haven’t found it. Then how are we supposed to be able to?”

“We need to talk to Mr Quinn again. Perhaps he still knows some details about his great-great-grandfather that he has not told us,” said Jupiter.

Suddenly Bob hit the desk with his flat hand. His friends flinched. “I got it! The chest!”

“What about the chest?” Pete asked.

“The chest has been in the family for generations,” Bob said. “It must be where the map is hidden!”

“But we searched it,” Pete objected.

“Search, yes, but not examined. Would you just put a valuable treasure map in a chest? No! I would build a secret compartment!” cried Bob enthusiastically. “Exactly! That’s it!”

“Great, Bob!” praised Jupiter. “But I could have thought of that myself.” He looked at his watch. “We’d better go and see Mr Quinn before he goes to the restaurant. We’re going to take this chest apart, fellas!”

Mr Quinn was surprised to see The Three Investigators again this afternoon. They told him what they had found out, starting with the suspicions about Conrad Farnham and Deborah Snell and ending with what Jupiter had deciphered in the diary.

“Amazing,” Quinn admitted. “Quite astonishing. But in all these decades, do you really think no one has ever found the treasure map?”

“Probably no one has ever looked for a secret compartment,” replied Jupiter.

“Wouldn’t it be better to notify the police before you go hunting for the treasure on your own... now that we know that Mr Farnham is behind all this?” Mr Quinn asked.

“It’s too early for the police. We have no evidence. This business with Farnham and Miss Snell is only a theory so far. Besides, they’ve done nothing wrong. After all, sailing a ship at night is no crime.”

Mr Quinn didn’t seem convinced. But by now he had probably realized that once The Three Investigators had got going, there was no stopping them. Resigned, he shrugged his shoulders. “Whatever you say, Jupiter. I have to go to the restaurant now. But you know how it is. You can look at the chest if you promise not to smash it.”

“Of course,” Jupe replied.

“All right. See you later!” Mr Quinn said.

The three hadn’t closed the front door completely behind him when they rushed to the ladder leading to the attic. The candles were still there. Bob lit them. In its warm light, the chest stood before them promisingly.

“Here we are. Let’s get to work!” Jupiter instructed. Together they tapped the wood for a hollow space.

“Nothing to hear,” Pete noted. “Come on, let’s empty the contents out first. Maybe it has a false bottom. That’s what I would do.”

In no time at all, they’d emptied out the papers. Jupiter reached in and felt across the floor, tapped it and used the flashlight to illuminate every crack.

“Nothing,” he muttered, disappointed. “There’s nothing.”

“What about the lid?” Bob suggested. But neither the examination of the lid, nor the hinges, nor the brass-plated corners, nor the lock produced any results.

They put the chest on its side, upside down, shook it and examined the wooden planks for carved letters or signs. Nothing.

"I don't believe it," Bob cursed. "I was so sure we'd find what we were looking for."

"The thought wasn't bad," Jupiter agreed with him.

"Hawk must have hidden the treasure map in some crevice in the rock," Pete said frustratedly. "And that's where it's been rotting for the last hundred years. The treasure is lost forever."

"Do you want to give up so easily?" Jupiter asked reproachfully. "It's just getting really exciting!"

"Sure. But how can we—"

"Shh!" Bob interrupted him. "Did you hear that?"

"What?" Pete asked.

"I heard something downstairs," Bob whispered. "Sounded like a door opening."

"Perhaps Mr Quinn has forgotten something," Pete whispered involuntarily.

"Let's have a look!" Jupiter told his friends to follow him and carefully descended the wooden ladder. The rungs creaked suspiciously. Examining the chest had taken longer than he had realized for it had already become dark outside.

The creaking of the parquet floor in the living room made Jupiter listen attentively. "There's someone here! And it's certainly not Mr Quinn who would have turned on the lights. Come on."

They sneaked through the house. The door to the living room was open. Jupiter took a look inside. Everything was dark. Not a sound could be heard. Carefully he entered the room. There was a back door leading to the terrace. The curtain bulged slightly. It was open a little. Someone had broken into the house! The First Investigator warned his friends with a show of hands.

Pete ran cold down his back. They were no longer alone. What could they do now?

"We'll search every single room!" whispered Jupiter as quietly as possible and left the living room. They crept into the kitchen. Here too it was pitch dark, but no one was hiding behind the door or under the table. The bathroom was empty, too.

Then they stood outside Mr Quinn's bedroom. Jupiter carefully pushed the handle down, but before he could open the door, it was ripped from the inside. Startled, The Three Investigators staggered a few steps back. Something white jumped at them. A skeleton! It only had one arm, but with that it swung a rusty sabre. A ghastly laughter sounded as the jaws of the pale skull dropped down.

Pete uttered a scream and retreated as the skeleton waved at him. It raised its sabre and let it swish down. The Second Investigator ducked at the last moment and the jagged blade hit the door frame. Then the skeleton jumped over him laughing and disappeared through the corridor to the living room.

For a moment, The Three Investigators were frozen in terror.

Then Jupiter shouted: "After it! It's getting away!" But neither Bob nor Pete moved.

"Come on, we can't let it get away!" No reaction. Without further ado, Jupiter went after it alone. But it was already too late. Nobody was in the living room. Jupiter ran out onto the terrace and looked around. No shadow scurrying away. No footsteps were heard. The eerie figure had disappeared.

Disappointed, he trotted back into the house.

Pete and Bob were waiting for him. "So?"

"Gone."

"That... that was Duncan's ghost, wasn't it?" Pete stuttered fearfully. "What was it? He will destroy anyone who gets in his way in search of the treasure... I want to go home!"

“Nonsense. That was not Duncan’s spirit, of course,” claimed Jupiter. “It was a black costume with painted bones and a skull mask.”

“I don’t care. I still want to go home,” Pete muttered. “I’ve lost all desire to go treasure hunting.”

“Why? We don’t have anything yet—” Jupiter objected.

“Why? Because this skeleton almost knocked my head off, that’s why!” Pete hissed at him.

“Does this mean you’re not going to the island?” Jupiter asked. “We were going to see if the ghost ship was hidden there.”

“Are you kidding? You planned this, not us! I’ve had enough for today! That’s it.” Pete angrily crossed his arms in front of his chest.

“I also think we should leave it for today, Juve,” Bob said conciliatory.

“But that was just a man in a costume,” Jupiter insisted. “Granted, it was a good costume, but you don’t really believe that a skeleton in person just jumped through the house.”

“No matter what we believe. That thing attacked me,” Pete reasoned. “That’s good enough reason for me.”

“Fine,” mumbled Jupiter. “Let’s go home.”

14. The Search for the Treasure Map

“The map...” mumbled Jupiter, as they sat together in Headquarters. “Where did Hawk hide it that night?”

Pete actually wanted to go home immediately, but the First Investigator had managed to persuade him to stay.

“We’ll never find out,” Pete was convinced. “If it’s not in the chest, it could be anywhere. In a crevice in the rock somewhere on the beach or something. We could search for a long time.”

Jupiter shook his head. “I don’t think so. He must have had it somewhere among his personal effects.”

“But all that was left of it was in the chest,” Bob said. “The rest has been lost over the decades.”

“Maybe not. Maybe there’s something else Mr Quinn didn’t tell us about,” Jupiter said. “It wouldn’t be the first time he’s failed to give us important information.”

“As far as I understand it, he sold all his grandfather’s junk to Uncle Titus,” Pete thought. “He just kept the chest. You were sorting through the stuff—did you see a treasure map?”

Bob shook his head. “Just the usual stuff—books, furniture, old dishes... but none of it was more than fifty years old.” He went over everything they had unpacked and sorted for Aunt Mathilda a few days ago. Had anything been hidden in the books? Bob grinned. “Perhaps there was a false bottom in one of the hat boxes. But unfortunately, they’re already sold.”

“Wait a minute!” cried Jupiter. As if stung by a tarantula, he jumped up. “The ships!”

“The ships?” Pete repeated. “What ships?”

“The ships in bottles!” Jupe exclaimed.

“Of course!” Bob remarked. “That was quite a collection! And Hawk writes in his diary —”

“—That he copied the ships of his enemies,” Jupiter finished the sentence. “Do you remember what he said about hiding the treasure? He said he had deposited it on the *Stormrider*! He didn’t mean the real *Stormrider*, he meant the model.”

“But it’s much too small for the treasure,” Pete objected.

“For the treasure, yes, but not for the map! There were stains in the diary. Not everything was decipherable. We misinterpreted the legible passages! It wasn’t about hiding the treasure, but hiding the map!”

“Genius!” cried Pete. “Of course! There’s plenty of room in a bottle for a map like that.” He jumped up. His bad mood was forgotten. “What are we waiting for?”

They stormed out of Headquarters and into the salvage yard. All the items—apart from the very valuable or weather-sensitive ones—were scattered all over the site under small rain shelters.

“That’s where we set up the ships in bottles,” Bob said, and ran to a small roof under which were two large shelves full of knick-knacks.

Since it was already dark, they shone a flashlight on the models. There were almost two dozen ships in bottles—presumably models of all the victims of Hawk the Tyrant.

“What!” whispered Pete. “I hope the *Stormrider* is still here!”

“Well, somehow the ships all look the same,” Bob said as he looked at the bottles. “We have to look at the names. Here, they’re written in tiny letters on the hull.”

They took each bottle off the shelf and examined it one by one. “*Enterprise... Voyager... Defiant...*” Pete read aloud. “Ships have some pretty strange names.”

With every ship in a bottle they put back, their hope of finding *Stormrider* dwindled. Maybe it had never been in the collection... Or worse, it had already been sold.

But then Bob cried out in joy: “Ha! Here it is! *Stormrider*!”

“Show me!” demanded Jupiter and looked at the model closely. The sea was modelled from a kind of plasticine. The ship’s masts looked like long toothpicks, the sails were made of thin linen. Even the skull and crossbones were there. In this scale, however, it was not even half the size of a stamp.

“Strange,” Jupiter said. “Somehow it looks very different from the ghost ship.”

“Yes,” Pete said. “This is about seven thousand times smaller.”

Jupiter gave him a reproachful look. “I mean something else. Come on, let’s compare the model with the photos you took, Bob.”

They returned to Headquarters. The First Investigator was right. “Look, the stern of the model ship is pointed. The ghost ship was flat.”

“True. What does that mean?” Pete asked.

“That someone didn’t go to a lot of trouble to reproduce the big model or the small model. I dare say Hawk was the more prudent one when it came to ships. It was Conrad Farnham who was sloppy with his ghost ship. But anyway, with any luck, we’ll find the solution in this bottle.”

“Well, how do we get the ship out?” Pete asked. “Or how did it even get in?”

“Ships in bottles are built so that the masts and sails lie flat against the hull,” explained Bob. “That way you can push it through the thin neck of the bottle. Then the masts are raised by pulling a string.”

“Right, Bob. And it is impossible to free the models from their glass prison. So I’m afraid we’ll have to destroy this little work of art.”

“Are you crazy, Jupe?” cried Pete. “This thing is ancient!”

“Prehistoric,” Bob joked.

“It’s a handiwork of the dreaded pirate Hawk himself!” Pete exclaimed. “You can’t just break it!”

“I don’t like it any more than you do, but there’s no other way. I will pay Aunt Mathilda,” promised Jupiter. He left Headquarters and went to the adjacent open-air workshop. A short time later, he returned with a hammer.

“What a pity,” he sighed, took aim and struck. The bottle shattered with a loud bang.

“Now what?” Pete asked. “Is there a hatch somewhere?”

“Doesn’t look like it,” Jupe said. “Probably now we’ll have to dismantle the ship as well. Don’t panic, I’ll be careful, then we can glue it back together later.”

With a pair of sharp scissors and tweezers, he sets about dismantling part of the deck. It was easier than he thought. After all these years, the glue didn’t hold very well. Carefully he took off the thin wooden board and looked into the cavity below.

“So? Is there anything in it?” Pete asked.

“There’s really something there!” Jupe shouted enthusiastically and fingered around in the miniature ship. He pulled out a small roll of ancient, yellowed paper, held together by a brown piece of thread.

“A little small for a treasure map,” Pete remarked. “Come on, open it!”

“But be careful,” Bob warned. “Or it will crumble to dust before we get a chance to look at it.”

Jupiter stripped the thread and carefully unrolled the paper. It crackled and cracked, but it remained whole. There it lay before them, the solution to the puzzle—a piece of paper no larger than a postcard. It was written in ink that had turned brown over time. Two shakily drawn shapes underneath each other, both marked with an arrow.

Pete squinting his eyes together. “What is this?”

“A map,” Jupe replied.

“And of what? The moon?”

“Very funny, Pete.”

“Why?” Pete said. “This thing does look a bit like a crescent moon.”

Bob’s face lit up. “Or like a hook! Of course! This is the ‘Hook’, Mr Farnham’s island!”

“You’re right, Bob! And now I recognize the other drawing... because that’s also the ‘Hook’, this time from the side.”

“It looks very different,” Pete thought.

“It’s the back. Neither of you have seen it. Look, this indentation must be the bay. And that there is the surface of the water. He also drew a part of the island under the water. And the arrow points to an opening.”

“A cave under the sea?” Bob asked.

“The hiding place of the treasure!” cried Pete. “Incredible!”

“Right under his butt,” mumbled Jupiter.

“Huh?” Pete said.

“That’s what Hawk meant when he wrote ‘right under his butt’. He didn’t mean Duncan’s ship, he meant his island,” Jupe explained. “Duncan was close to his treasure all the time. Hawk knew Duncan would have tracked down every other hiding place eventually. But on his own island, he never would have suspected it. Hawk probably wanted to get the treasure once he had finally defeated his opponent. But he never got around to that.”

“And the same fate has befallen Farnham,” continued Bob. “He has been searching for the treasure for years and has no idea that he is sitting on it all the time.”

“In any case, we won’t tell him until we get the treasure. Tomorrow night, Operation Pirate’s Treasure starts. We will borrow diving equipment, underwater lights and Mr Quinn’s boat and dive into the cave.”

“At night? Isn’t that dangerous?” Pete interjected.

“During the day, Farnham would see us at once,” Jupe said.

“I still can’t believe it,” Bob said. “We actually found the treasure.”

“Not so fast, Bob. We haven’t got it yet. We have to find the cave first. Maybe the entrance collapsed in all that time. You know how rugged this island is. But we’ll find out tomorrow.”

15. The Diving Spot

The next morning, the Second Investigator was rudely awakened. His mother called out to him: "Pete! Phone for you!"

"Who's calling me at this hour?" he growled angrily, but with a glance at the alarm clock, he realized that it was already seven o'clock. He had slept badly. In a dream, he had been followed by one-armed skeletons and ghost ships that wanted to put him in an oversized bottle. Groaning, he climbed out of bed and trotted down to the phone.

"Yes?"

"Good morning. It's me, Jupe. I have an assignment for you."

"Good morning to you, too. What kind of assignment?"

"You must ask your father to find something out for us," Jupiter said. "You have no idea what I just discovered."

"No guessing games in the early morning, Jupe," Pete asked. "Get to the point!"

"Your father knows many people in the movies. Maybe he can locate the team that worked on Conrad Farnham's last movie. You know, *Pirate's Island*."

"And why?"

"In this movie, an old pirate ship appears. I want to know all about it—whether could it really move or was it just a dummy. Above all, I'm interested in what happened to it after the shooting."

"What's the point?"

"I went to the video store last night and rented *Pirate's Island*. You won't believe it. The ship the pirates are on in the movie is not called *Stormrider*, but it looks exactly like our ghost ship! I took a freeze frame and compared it with the photos. There's no doubt—we are dealing with a movie ship all the time."

Bob was the last one to arrive at Headquarters early in the evening. He had been assigned to take care of the diving equipment.

"Well, got it all?" Jupiter asked.

"Yeah. I rented it from Outdoor World," Bob said. "Sandy gave me a good price for it."

Sandy Allen worked with The Three Investigators in a previous case.

"You know what, Jupe," Bob added. "She still remembered the size of the wet suit you wore, but I took a size larger, just in case."

"Very funny, Bob," Jupe quipped.

Pete grinned. "We'll be rich tomorrow. The first thing I'll do is buy my own diving equipment."

"Let us find the treasure first," Jupiter suggested.

"What about the movie ship?" Bob asked. "Jupe told me about it over the phone. Did your father find out anything, Pete?"

The Second Investigator nodded. "A colleague of his was there at the time. You were absolutely right, Jupe. It was a lifelike replica of an old sailing ship, at least from the outside. But if you stand on deck, you see that everything is just a fake. The cannons are not real and the sails are set with winches, not by hand."

“And what happened to this ship?”

“That’s what the production company asked itself after the shooting. They wanted to scrap it, after all it was much too big to be stored somewhere. But then Conrad Farnham agreed to buy it over. After all, he was the producer of the movie.”

“Aha!” said Jupiter triumphantly. “Then he only had to paint the name *Stormrider* on the hull and the ghost ship was ready.”

“Not quite,” Bob objected. “What about the ship’s disappearance? Do you know anything about that, Pete?”

“Unfortunately, no. My father looked at me very strangely when I asked him about it. He said he didn’t know of any special effects that could make such a large object disappear in front of a running camera. But I do know how the ship could move around even though the sails are broken. The film crew had the same problem—how could they get the ship moving if there was no wind on the day of shooting? It’s very simple. It’s motorized.”

Bob shook his head vigorously. “Impossible! That’s what we were looking for. There was no engine!”

Pete smiled. “Right. That’s the trick.”

“What do you mean?” Bob asked.

“During the shooting, the exact same problem came up. The ship was supposed to be sailing, but at the same time there were some dialogue scenes, so the sound had to be recorded as well. Unfortunately, there was always a lot of engine noise in the background and that doesn’t seem very credible in a pirate movie. The director was against dubbing the scenes, so the people from the special effects department sat down and did some tinkering. The result was a silenced engine that’s almost impossible to hear.”

“Fantastic, Pete!” cried Jupiter. “It’s a good thing your father works in movies, otherwise we’d never have found out. So now that we’ve solved this mystery too, we just have to find the treasure.”

They checked their equipment—wet suits, oxygen bottles and underwater flashlights, a rope, walkie-talkies, a compass and last but not least Jupiter’s self-built tracking crossbow. When everything was safely stowed away, they set off. Mr Quinn had already been informed. He would wait for them on the beach.

The sun was just setting when they reached Malibu Beach. There were still some people on the beach, but soon nobody would be out here.

Mr Quinn had taken the night off at the restaurant. “I’ve changed my mind,” he said. “I’ll have to inform the police. Your scheme is far too dangerous.”

“What would the police do, Mr Quinn?” Jupiter asked.

“Let them take care of the treasure,” Quinn said.

“What if we were wrong and there is no treasure? Then we’ll have lost our reputation as detectives.” Jupiter shook his head firmly. “We’ll leave as soon as it gets dark. But I’ve made provision for an emergency. Here’s a radio for you. You wait for us on the mainland. We’ll stay in touch by radio. If anything happens, you can get help.”

“Wouldn’t it still be better if the police—”

“Mr Quinn!” the First Investigator interrupted him. “Please! We know what we’re doing!”

“Really?” Pete murmured so softly that no one heard. He was looking out to sea. The fog drove away the surfers and sailors who were still out there. Half an hour later, no one was on the beach.

“Here we go,” Bob said and started to change. It was better to put the wetsuits on ashore. By the time they had all squeezed into the black rubber suit and checked the oxygen

equipment one last time, it was pitch dark and the fog had become so thick that not even the lighthouse of the 'Hook' could be seen.

"We'll be in touch with you regularly," Jupiter promised the worried looking Mr Quinn. Then they got into the small boat, started the engine and sailed out into the night ocean.

"Hopefully we won't miss the island," said Pete, who was straining to look for the lighthouse beacon.

"Don't worry," Jupiter assured him. "This time we brought a compass. We're headed straight for the 'Hook'."

Jupiter was right. Some time later, the island appeared before them. "The best thing is to steer a wide arc so Farnham can't hear us and get suspicious."

Bob, who was at the helm, steered the boat generously around the island until its open side lay before them as a black silhouette. He accelerated once more, then turned off the engine and they drifted the last bit.

Soon they reached the huge rock rising out of the sea. High above them was the lighthouse, on the right was the bay blocked by the net.

"If the map is correct, the entrance to the cave should be directly below us." The First Investigator reached for the radio and contacted Quinn: "We have reached the island and will now go to the diving point. We'll contact you in fifteen minutes at the latest."

"All right. Be careful! Good luck."

"Who stays up?" Jupiter looked at his friends expectantly.

"I'm not attracted to water," Pete said quickly. "But you won't let me stay here."

"Right. You are the best diver among us," said Jupiter.

Bob raised his hand. "I'm volunteering. You go ahead and freeze your butts off in the water."

"Good." They strapped the oxygen tanks to their backs, put on their flippers and checked their flashlights. "Everything's fine. We'll be back in five minutes. At the latest."

Pete and Jupiter nodded to each other and at the same time let themselves fall backwards overboard. The cold of the water made the Second Investigator gasp for breath at the first moment. He switched on the flashlight and oriented himself. The water was murky, but the rocks were clearly visible.

He gave Jupiter a sign and let himself sink down. The rugged walls slipped past him. Pete lit them with his flashlight, but the beam of light was so small that he could only see a small section. The artificial light cast deep shadows and Pete thought he had discovered the cave entrance more than once. But each time there were only depressions in the rock, which did not lead very far into the rock.

They systematically searched the wall. Now and then Pete let the light shine around. He had the feeling of being surrounded by hungry sharks, which were not rare in this area. Fortunately, none of the animals showed up.

Jupiter tapped symbolically on his non-existent wristwatch and pointed upwards. Together they appeared.

"So?" Bob asked curiously.

"Nothing. We'll go right back down and keep looking. This time we stay down for ten minutes, all right? In the meantime, you can report to Quinn."

They went into the water again. According to Hawk's treasure map, the cave entrance wasn't very deep, otherwise he could not have hidden the treasure there without a diving gear. So they stayed on that level and this time they searched a little more to the left.

After five minutes, Pete was blinded by Jupiter's lamp. He looked over. The First Investigator waved him over excitedly and pointed to a rock that protruded a bit from the

wall. Pete swam closer and looked into a rugged, dark opening in the rock. Together they shone into it, but the beam from the flashlight was not reflected. The hole drilled deep into the island.

It was the entrance to the cave!

16. Discovered!

Bob kept looking at his watch. Jupiter had said ten minutes, but the time was up.

"Don't be nervous," he murmured. Maybe he should tell Mr Quinn first, so he wouldn't go crazy. He quickly lifted the walkie-talkie to his mouth and announced that everything was fine. A lie!

Eleven minutes. No sign of Jupe and Pete. Bob was worried. They hadn't worked out a plan for an emergency. Should he go after them or get help? Bob thought of worst-case nightmare scenarios. Maybe they had been attacked by a shark, maybe the oxygen equipment was broken or they were stuck in a crevice in the rock. Who knew what kind of danger was lurking down there!

After twelve minutes, he had enough. Quickly, he put on his diving equipment, moored the boat to a rocky outcrop and slipped into the fins. At this moment, Pete and Jupiter returned to the surface, snorting.

"There you are at last!" cried Bob furiously. "I was just coming to look for you." He started to take his fins off again.

"Leave everything on!" Jupiter instructed. "We need your help!"

"Have you found anything?" Bob asked.

"You can say that," Pete replied. "The entrance to the cave! It's a wide tunnel, but after a few metres, it is blocked by a boulder in a narrow place. We can't get it out, but maybe the three of us can."

"Wow. And you really think it's beyond that chunk?"

"Looks like it," replied Jupiter.

"I'm in! Just a minute!" Bob turned on the walkie-talkie again. "Bob to Mr Quinn... Pete and Jupiter have found the cave. We'll go down together. It may be a while before we get back to you. Give us half an hour."

"All right," Quinn's worried voice came off the speaker. It was obvious that he didn't think it was alright at all.

"Let's go!" Bob put the walkie-talkie aside and jumped into the water.

Together they dived down to the entrance. It was an eerie feeling, swimming into the tunnel. Bob felt as if the island was swallowing him up. He was surrounded by cold water and darkness and tons of rock. And after a few metres, they reached the rock. It wasn't easy to position themselves so that everyone could help you. But finally all three had found a good place. Jupiter gave the starting signal and the three of them tugged at the boulder.

It gave way and rolled towards them. Now the passage was free. Jupiter swam through first. The passage became wider again. After only a few metres, he made a bend upwards. Jupiter emerged and suddenly he pushed through the water surface.

"It went faster than I thought," Pete gasped. "Where are we?" He let the flashlight wander around.

They were in a large cave whose only entrance and exit seemed to be this little water tunnel. They climbed out and looked around. The cave was high, the floor uneven, the rugged walls shining wet. It smelled like salt water.

"Wow," Bob whispered, moved. "A real treasure cave. That's crazy!"

"Only the treasure is missing," remarked Jupiter. "Do you see anything?"

"It seems to go on ahead," Pete said and pointed to a large rock that blocked their view. "Let's have a look."

It was difficult to walk on the stony ground, especially with flippers on their feet. This cave had grown naturally, nobody had ever bothered to straighten the ground.

"I wonder if anyone besides Hawk and us had ever been here before," Pete whispered. His voice echoed eerily from the cold walls.

"I don't know. Doesn't look like it." Jupiter reached a huge rock, looked around it and gasped in surprise. "Oh my goodness!"

"What? What is it?" cried Pete and stumbled past the First Investigator.

Then he saw it—the treasure of Duncan the Dark... the treasure that Mr Quinn's ancestor took from him and hid here... the treasure that had been forgotten for decades.

"Is this it? That's the treasure?" asked Bob incredulously.

No chests of gold. No gems. No jewels. No glittering ducats.

They were barrels. A dozen or so wooden barrels piled behind the rock.

"What's in there?" Pete wanted to know.

Jupiter went closer. The wood was dark brown from age, the iron rings that held it together were rusty. But when he illuminated the barrels, he saw that something was burned into each one. It had big letters that said 'Kentucky Whisky'.

"Whisky?" said the First Investigator soundlessly. Then he laughed softly and turned to his friends. "It's whisky!"

"Whisky?" Pete repeated. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Whisky means whisky. This is the fabulous treasure. What did Hawk write in his journal? 'I took from him the most precious thing he captured in all those years.' Whisky. A dozen casks of it. No doubt immensely valuable to Duncan, the old drunk." Jupiter laughed again.

"What's so funny, Jupe?" Pete asked indignantly. "We tear each other's legs off and what do we find? Ancient liquor. By the barrel. And that's all there is to it?"

"I think you underestimate this find, Pete," Jupiter said. "This whisky is over one hundred and fifty years old and is probably the oldest thing that whisky connoisseurs have seen and tasted since eternity. Do you know how expensive a bottle of thirty-year-old good whisky alone is? Almost priceless for the average consumer. Here we are not dealing with bottles, but with barrels. And they're five or six times as old."

"You... you mean this stuff is valuable?" Bob asked, astonished. "And you can still drink it?"

"Of course! Whisky has to mature, possibly for decades. The longer the better! And the more expensive. I admit, this is a rather unusual treasure, but nonetheless worth at least a hundred thousand dollars or more."

"Awesome!" Pete's mood suddenly improved. He stroked the old, cracked wood in awe. "We must tell Mr Quinn! Shall we take a barrel with us right away?"

"Better not," said Jupiter. "It must have been really difficult to get all that stuff into the cave. Maybe there used to be an above-ground access point that Hawk sealed off. Either way, we need to figure out how to get these things out before we get hopelessly stuck in that tunnel with them. We found what we came for. I wouldn't mind disappearing for the day."

"All right. The treasure won't run away." Bob smiled. "Because one thing's for sure—Farnham will never find it. He can ride around in his fake *Stormrider* for as long as he wants."

They stumbled back to the water tunnel and went down one by one. The way back through the tunnel was easy.

But when they reached the other side, a nasty surprise awaited them.

"The boat!" gasped Bob. "Where is the boat?"

"It's gone," shouted Pete, startled. "Bob, you fool! You didn't tie it up!"

"Yes, I did!" Bob defended himself, helplessly struggling in the water. "One hundred percent! I tied the rope to this ledge! I tied it tight."

"Nonsense," Pete countered. "There is barely any movement in the sea. If you'd tied it up, it could've hardly broken loose. Or would boats near the island disappear into thin air?"

"Worse," said Jupiter in a lowered voice. "Much worse. I fear we've been discovered!"

"Excuse me?" Pete asked.

"Farnham saw us and took the boat. But he doesn't know where we are."

"Holy cow," Pete whispered. "What are we going to do? I'm freezing. We can't stay in the water forever! How are we going to get back? Swim? To the mainland? I might be able to make it, but what about you?"

"We have to go ashore first," Jupiter decided. "The rocks are too steep here. Best we swim to the front of the island."

"If you're right, then Farnham will be out there looking for us!" Bob suggested.

"Then we can still dive down," Jupe said. "Come on, let's go! I can't stand being in this water for very long."

Without waiting for an answer, Jupiter set himself in motion. They were quite fast with their fins and had already half circled the 'Hook' after a few minutes. From the front of the island, they could see up to the house where the lights were on. They reached the shallow beach and got out of the water. Panting, they rested for a while in the sand.

"The boat must be somewhere," said Jupiter. "The island is not that big. We'll find it and get off as fast as we can!"

He was about to straighten up when the beam of a flashlight went over the rocks. A second light joined in. Now they heard soft voices. A woman cursed: "Those damned boys! They must be somewhere!"

"What if it wasn't their boat?" said the second person.

"But surely it was theirs. Jimmy saw the three of them from the lighthouse! They're around here somewhere! But we'll find them!"

The two people came closer. The Three Investigators jumped up before the flashlights could catch them and hid behind a nearby rock. They waited, holding their breath.

Jupiter had recognized the voices—it was Deborah Snell and Conrad Farnham. They lit up the whole island, the rays flashed over and over again to their hiding place, but The Three Investigators ducked and after a while, the two of them left.

"Phew!" moaned Bob. "Come on, let's find the boat and get out of here." They scrambled up and sneaked to the jetty. The *Rainbow's* white hull was rocking along quietly. And behind it, on the bank, was their little motorboat.

"Thank goodness we found it!" Bob whispered.

They ran towards it and were about to jump in when they saw the presents.

"They've knocked a hole in it," hissed Pete. "The boat is full of water! How are we going to get out now?"

Grinding their teeth in anger and disappointment, they stood in front of the wreck that had once been their boat.

Bob saved the dripping wet backpack floating inside. "So now what?"

Jupiter looked over at the *Rainbow*. “We’ll just take their yacht!” They looked at each other in surprise.

“Of course!” cried Pete and sprinted off. A narrow wooden gangplank led up to the *Rainbow*’s deck. They sneaked up and crouched down to the tiny bridge house from which the yacht could be steered.

Pete pushed the handle down, but the door was locked. “What a bummer,” he growled. “What a bloody mess!”

“Can’t you get the door open?” Bob asked, because the Second Investigator was an expert in opening locks.

“How?” Pete asked with a sore face. “I don’t happen to have my lock picks with me. After all, we only wanted to find a treasure, not steal a yacht. We can’t break the door down either. It makes too much noise. Farnham would be here in no time.”

“All right. Then now Plan B comes into effect,” Jupiter decided. “Mr Quinn must send help. Hand me the radio, Bob.”

Bob dug it out of the bag. But when Jupiter turned it on, nothing moved. No hissing, not even a soft crackling. He shook it. Small water drops splashed out of the speaker and the battery compartment.

17. Escape Through the Fog

“The water ruined it completely!” Jupiter angrily threw the radio to the ground.

“Hey! Are you stupid!” hissed Pete. “They’ll hear us!”

“We’re stuck on this damned island!” growled Jupiter. “Hopefully Mr Quinn is scared enough to call the police on his own. I wouldn’t mind now.”

“But we can’t count on that,” Bob said. “There must be some way off this island! Somehow—”

“The ghost ship!” cried Pete. “Of course! We still have the ghost ship! I’m sure it’s hidden in the bay!”

“You’re right, Pete!” Jupe exclaimed.

“You... you wanna go away in the ghost ship?” Bob asked, surprised.

“Sure, Bob, we know how it works now!” Pete said. “The best thing is to swim over. We can swim under the stupid safety net.”

“Then let’s get going, because the search party is coming back over there,” Pete whispered and pointed to the dancing lights that were approaching them again.

Bob reached for the backpack, which now contained no more water-sensitive objects, and The Three Investigators jumped from the jetty into the ocean. From the ocean, they saw Deborah and Mr Farnham, who continued to search for them. Fortunately, neither of them had the idea of shining into the water.

Pete reached the cordoned-off bay first. He dived into the depth, under the net and on the other side again. “It’s easy!”

A moment later, Bob and Jupiter were with him. They swam into the bay that had eaten into the island like a wedge. It was a perfect hiding place. And on the right side, hidden between the massive rock and invisible from the open ocean, was the *Stormrider*—the ghost ship!

It stood out in the darkness only by its straight shape from the surrounding rocks. The Three Investigators were very close before they noticed it.

“There it is,” Pete gasped. “But how are we going to get on board? Look, there’s no beach and no jetties. There are only pointy things here. Mr Farnham probably came down from the top every time. We can’t do it from the water. Unless someone can climb up the smooth hull.”

“I don’t think so,” Bob replied. “What if we swim back and try to get to it by land?”

“Too dangerous,” said Jupiter. “We’d have to walk all over the island. In the end we’d be discovered after all. I have a better idea!”

He swam to a large stone, which he could scramble up a bit. From here he couldn’t go on, but at least he didn’t have to stay in the water. “Come on up! Bob, I need the backpack!”

Bob handed it over. Jupiter rummaged through it and finally pulled out his self-made crossbow and the rope.

“What are you doing?” Pete wanted to know.

“We’ll board the ship with an old pirate trick,” Jupiter explained and tied the rope firmly to the metal bolts. Then he held up the crossbow, inserted the bolt, took aim and pulled the

trigger. The bullet flew up, taking with it the rope like a fluttering ribbon. It hit somewhere on deck.

Jupiter pulled at the other end of the rope, but to his disappointment the bolt came down again. He tried it again. At the fifth attempt, the bullet finally got stuck somewhere and the rope didn't give way even when Jupiter hung on with all his weight.

"Who would have thought what my invention would be good for," he grinned and tried to pull himself up. But he only got a metre far, then he dangled helplessly on the outside wall of the ship.

"I can't go any further," he groaned.

"Let me try," Pete asked him. Jupiter let himself fall and handed Pete the rope. The Second Investigator took off his flippers and shuffled skilfully upwards as if he had done nothing else all his life.

"Pete is descended in direct line from monkeys," mocked Jupiter. "I always knew it." But secretly, he admired him for his climbing skills.

It took Bob a little longer, but even for him it was no problem to get on deck. With united forces, the two of them finally pulled the First Investigator up.

"This can't go on," Pete grumbled. "When we get through this, I'll take you to the gym."

"Is that a threat?" Jupe asked.

"That's a promise," Pete said. "Now let's get out of here."

They turned on the flashlights and searched the deck.

Pete's father had been right. As real as the ship looked from the outside, you could tell immediately that it was a replica. Everything looked much too new and modern. The cannons looked as if they were made of plastic, there were half-hearted cables hidden everywhere. Behind the steering wheel there was a small control panel from which the engine could be started and the speed could be regulated.

Suddenly Pete winced. "There's someone there!" He pointed to the back of the ship.

There stood a pale figure. The figure turned its back to them and did not move. It must have been waiting there the whole time.

Bob giggled softly. "That is Duncan's ghost," he whispered. "We've had the pleasure of his company before."

"Duncan's... ghost?" Pete stuttered.

"Yes, the skeleton we discovered in our pursuit of the ghost ship." They went closer. It was a plastic skeleton, like they knew from biology class. It was dangling from a rope. The left arm was missing.

"Look, it really flaps when you touch it," Jupiter noted. "I must have thought that was a nod at the time. What a cheap trick."

"But you fell for it," Pete said with a grin. "It was just a plastic skeleton, how lucky!"

Suddenly, he listened up. Was there a noise? Footsteps and voices?

"There they are down there! ... On the *Stormrider*," Farnham's voice was heard. Two lights danced from the lighthouse through the rocks. Their pursuers had spotted them!

"Now let's get going," Jupiter cried, ran to the control panel and pressed the start button on the fly. The engine started up with a low hum. It was really hardly audible. "Cast off!"

Pete and Bob jumped to the ropes with which the ship was moored and released them. Already the *Stormrider* started to move. Not a second too soon, because at that moment, Conrad Farnham and Deborah Snell reached the ship, but it was too late. The Three Investigators were already too far from shore.

"You bloody brats!" cried Farnham. "Come back here!"

"Go for it, Jupe!" Bob shouted.

“Look out!” cried Pete. “You’re going to hit the rocks!”

Jupiter tore the steering wheel hard around. The ship tilted to the side and scraped past the pointed projections by a hair’s breadth. Now it sailed straight out of the bay, out into the open sea and into the fog. The angry roar ceased behind them.

“Good thing we brought a compass. There’s no compass here,” Jupiter said when they left the ‘Hook’ behind them.

“Where are we going?” Pete asked.

“Back to the mainland, what else?” Jupe replied.

“They won’t let us get far,” Bob suspected. “The *Rainbow* will be on our tail in two minutes. They’ll catch up with us.”

The First Investigator steered the ship around the island and headed for the coast. The fog was so thick that after a short time, they could no longer see the lighthouse. There was only darkness around them. Suddenly, the sound of engines joined the splashing of the waves—the *Rainbow*!

“Now it’s over,” whispered Pete. Through the fog, the yacht’s headlights shimmered. They lit up the air, but the light never reached the *Stormrider*. The *Rainbow* was only a little faster than *Stormrider* and approached from the side. It was directly on a collision course. Jupiter reduced the speed.

The white yacht slipped past *Stormrider*’s bow less than twenty metres away. For a moment, they could even hear Deborah cursing: “Damn the fog! You can hardly see your hand in front of your eyes! Where is that damn ship?” Then the voices and the hum of the engine died down. The *Rainbow* moved away.

“They didn’t see us,” whispered Pete. “They passed us by a hair’s breadth and never saw us! How is that possible?”

“Of course!” cried Jupiter and struck his flat hand against his forehead. “That is the secret of the ghost ship! We are so stupid!”

“What are you talking about, Jupe?” Pete asked.

“The *Stormrider*, of course, never disappeared into thin air.”

“Then what?” Pete wondered.

“I just turned off the lights. An unlit ship without position lights is simply not visible in the fog and darkness. It disappears into nothingness, so to speak, as soon as all lights are off. Remember three days ago when we were followed by a car? And how did we lose it? By turning off the lights and disappearing into the dark! That’s exactly how it works here. We could only see the *Rainbow* because it had its headlights on. But there are no headlights here, so we’re invisible to the people chasing us!”

“But we have seen the ghost ship before! It even glowed!”

“The lights were still on then,” explained Jupiter.

“Lights?” Pete asked. “What kind of lights? There are no lights on this ship!”

At that moment, there was light. It was as if the sun suddenly rose. The dark wood of the hull, the sails, the ropes, everything around the ghost ship began to glow white. It got brighter and brighter until the ship finally shone like a lantern and could probably be seen through the fog far out to sea.

18. Disappeared into Thin Air

“What now?” cried Pete in horror.

“I’m afraid someone has turned on the light,” replied Jupiter.

“The *Rainbow*! It’s coming back!” Bob pointed forward. The yacht had turned around and was heading straight for The Three Investigators. The ghost ship could now be seen. It was lit up like a Christmas tree.

Within seconds, the yacht had reached them. Jupiter tried to turn around, but it was too late. The *Rainbow* went alongside, a rope with a hook flew onto the deck and a short time later, Conrad Farnham jumped onto the ghost ship. In one hand he held a gun. “Engine off,” he gave a curt order. “Go!”

Jupiter went to the control panel and stopped the ship. The *Stormrider* and the *Rainbow* continued to drift side by side for a while, until finally they only swayed up and down in the gentle waves. In the meantime, the white yacht was shining by itself.

Deborah Snell came on board. “You damn boys,” she hissed. “You never should have got involved in this.”

She pulled out a mobile phone, dialled a number and said: “We got them, Jimmy. You can turn the lights off now. See you later.”

A moment later, the light from the lighthouse faded and finally disappeared completely and darkness reigned again.

“What do you want from us?” Bob started it. “Let us go.”

“Let you go?” Conrad Farnham laughed. “How could I do that? You trespassed on my property and stole my ship. I have a right to detain you.”

“That won’t help you much,” replied Jupiter. “In a few minutes, the police will be here. Then you have to let us go anyway.”

“The police?” Deborah Snell laughed. “Do you think your dear friend Mr Quinn would have called the police? I must disappoint you boys. Mr Quinn is currently bound and gagged in the lighthouse. Jimmy has caught him.”

“Your friend, the lighthouse keeper,” Jupiter suspected and tried to hide his emerging fear as without Quinn’s help, they were now really trapped. “He was also the one who made the ghost ship glow, wasn’t he? With the help of a black light spotlight he directed at the *Stormrider*.”

“Black light?” Pete asked. “What is that?”

“Ultraviolet light, also called black light,” explained Jupiter. “It is invisible to the human eye, but as soon as it hits bright surfaces or phosphorescent materials, they light up. It is often used in discos and looks particularly cool if you wear a white T-shirt. But it is also ideal for making ghost ships appear and disappear. I suspect that the whole ship has been coated with an invisible paint that only starts to glow when illuminated by ultraviolet light. At the top of the lighthouse is a spotlight that has illuminated the ship. Jimmy just turned it off, so it’s dark again now.”

“Clever boy,” Farnham said, grinning sardonically. “If you know so much, I’m sure you can tell us where the treasure is.”

“What treasure?” Jupe asked.

“Don’t pretend like you don’t know what’s going on,” Deborah ran into him. “I have been watching you. You know something about the treasure. It’s in an underwater cave, isn’t it? That much we have found out over time. All we needed was the map.”

“You were watching us?” Bob asked. “So you were the one following us in the car?”

“Indeed. I’ve been following you around a few times.” She smiled. “But most of the time you didn’t notice. So there’s no point in denying it. You have found the treasure. Where is it?”

No one answered.

“Remember this,” Mr Farnham said. “Mr Quinn is in our custody. If you don’t want anything to happen to him, you’d better answer us.” His face darkened. “Now!”

The First Investigator hesitated for a while, then he resigned and said: “Alright. We have found the treasure. It’s in a cave under the water.”

Jupiter described the spot exactly. “Are you happy now?”

“Very much so,” replied Conrad Farnham with a smile. “I can’t tell you how grateful I am to you for discovering the treasure for me.”

“You won’t get away with this,” cried Pete, furiously. “We’ll report you! You threatened and detained Mr Quinn and us.”

“But you stole my ship,” Farnham replied. “I guess it evens out, doesn’t it?”

“We’ll notify the police,” Pete promised. “You’re not keeping the treasure!”

“Oh, yes, I will. It’s on my property. The entire ‘Hook’ is mine.”

Pete clenched his fists in rage, but he could think of no response.

“Would you be so kind as to answer a few more questions?” Jupiter asked.

“Of course,” Mr Farnham said. “I owe it to you.”

“Good. What exactly did you have in mind for Mr Quinn? You wanted to frighten him with your replica ghost ship, but what was the point? It wouldn’t have brought you any closer to your treasure.”

“Yes, it would. For years, I worked on his stubborn grandfather, but the old man wouldn’t let me look at his family heirlooms. So I devised the plan with the pirate curse. Then he died and his grandson inherited the entire estate. However, I had already done so much with the ghost ship. I would have continued the show for a while until Quinn couldn’t sleep because of fear. In a week, I would have gone and squeezed information out of him about his ancestor Hawk. I’m sure he would have told me everything voluntarily and given me all the documents I wanted.”

Jupiter turned to Deborah and asked: “But why did you stop Pete and Kelly on Friday night? You’ve been after Mr Quinn since the beginning.”

Miss Snell made an angry face. “A silly coincidence,” she growled. “Haven’t you noticed?”

“What?” Jupiter asked.

“That Pete and Quinn drive the same car?”

“Excuse me?” Pete asked astonished.

“We have not seen Mr Quinn’s car before,” Bob said.

“He drives a red MG, just like Pete. That night, Jimmy watched the road from the lighthouse while I lurked in the embankment. When he saw the MG coming, he called me. I jumped onto the road, thinking that it was Quinn. I’d never seen him before... I was only given a description,” Deborah said and turned to Pete. “When you came out, I found that you matched Quinn’s description, so I proceeded with the plan. It was a silly coincidence!”

“But the next day you were cleared up about your mistake,” Jupiter tied the story together. “So you denied everything on our first visit.”

Deborah nodded. "But you wouldn't let up. We saw you with Quinn, hanging around the beach, so we decided to play the game again."

"That's why you were so eager to tell me the pirate story, Mr Farnham," Jupiter surmised. "That's why you admitted everything the next day, Miss Snell. You wanted to frighten us, to keep us off the case."

"Right. But it didn't work. Instead of giving up, you kept exploring. You even went after the ghost ship. Conrad was steering it while I was on the island. As you got closer, Jimmy turned off the black light, and I went out on the *Rainbow* to intercept and drive you away. Fortunately, you didn't recognize me. Yet you didn't stop. My last attempt to chase you away was my appearance as a skeleton in Quinn's house last night. But even that didn't scare you off." She smiled. "But in retrospect, nothing better could have happened to us. After all, you led us straight to the treasure. Thank you very much!"

"So what now?" Bob asked grumpy.

"Now we're going to bring you ashore," replied Mr Farnham amusedly.

"What about Mr Quinn?" Pete asked.

"We'll release him immediately, of course. We're not criminals. We only wanted what was rightfully ours. And we have that now." Smiling, he directed The Three Investigators to the *Rainbow*.

"Thank goodness you're safe," Bob said when they met Mr Quinn at the salvage yard the next day. The lighthouse keeper had indeed overpowered him, but released him immediately. "We were really afraid that Jimmy might hurt you."

"I was afraid for you as well," Quinn replied. "Thank goodness everything went well."

"Went well?" Pete grimaced. "I wouldn't call it that. I think we failed across the board. And to add to that, your boss's boat was destroyed."

"Not to worry about that," Mr Quinn said. "I've already settled it with him. To me, you solved the mystery of the ghost ship and found the lost treasure of my great-great-grandfather."

"Found it?" Pete remarked. "But now Farnham has it and there's nothing we can do about it. Can we, Juve?"

The First Investigator shook his head. "The treasure is ancient stolen items. No one has a right to it anymore, except for the person on whose property it is found. Farnham is right, and we can twist and turn as we please."

Bob, who was as frustrated as Pete, said, "We have to report him. There's no way he can get away with it."

"But he hasn't committed a crime," Jupiter shrugged. "At least not a big one."

"He captured Mr Quinn and held a gun on us," Pete said.

"But as he said, we stole his ship," Juve said. "What could happen is that we end up in court, not him."

"But there must be something we can do! He has the treasure!" Pete cried.

"True. It's his." Jupiter smiled. "Let him have it, after all he's been looking for it much longer than we have."

"Excuse me?" Pete couldn't believe his ears. "We should let him have it?"

"Yes. We would have had no right to the treasure," Juve affirmed.

"But Mr Quinn!" Pete said. "After all, you are the heir to Hawk the Tyrant."

"I doubt a court of law will recognize this. After all, it was all five generations ago." Mr Quinn waved it away. "I don't want the treasure. I'm just glad it's all over now. Let Mr

Farnham be happy with his whisky. I don't want it."

Suddenly Jupiter snorted away. He laughed so loudly that the others looked at him in horror.

"Jupe!" cried Pete. "What's with you now?"

"I haven't told you the whole story yet." Jupe quipped.

"The whole story?" Bob asked. "Okay, what's that?"

"Conrad Farnham, his nephew and his girlfriend Deborah won't have much fun with their treasure."

"Why not?" Pete asked.

"Because there is no treasure." Again he giggled.

"You've lost your mind," Pete was convinced. "Of course there's treasure! We saw it with our own eyes!"

"We saw whisky barrels," the First Investigator corrected him.

"Yes. And you said they were incredibly valuable because they were so old," Pete recalled.

"True. But I thought about it all again last night and asked myself why I've never heard of hundred-year-old whisky. And then I had a suspicion, which I confirmed this morning by calling a whisky merchant in Los Angeles." He took a dramatic pause. "Whisky must be aged in wooden casks. As it matures, the drink oxidises very slowly, releasing its aroma. That's why the casks have to be made of wood because wood breathes. The wood allows air to enter the cask and water to evaporate out. It wouldn't work in glass bottles."

"So?" Bob wasn't sure what Jupiter was getting at.

"As it matures, the whisky gradually evaporates. It should therefore be bottled after thirty years at the latest. Because after sixty or seventy years or so, nothing will be left of the precious drop. It would have evaporated completely. The barrels have been lying in the cave for over one hundred and fifty years. They should be empty—absolutely empty."

Pete, Bob and Mr Quinn were staring at him.

Mr Quinn was the first to smile. Then Bob started smiling. And finally, they all laughed loudly.

"This can't be happening!" cried Pete laughing. "If it weren't so absurd, I would cry!"

"The treasure has vanished!" Bob gasped in tears. "Just like that! All that fuss over a few empty wooden barrels! Incredible!"

"Well," Jupiter said and leaned back with a satisfied smile. "I must apologize to you. Haven't I always said that solid objects, such as ships, cannot disappear into thin air? Now I know better—at least pirate treasures sometimes do!"